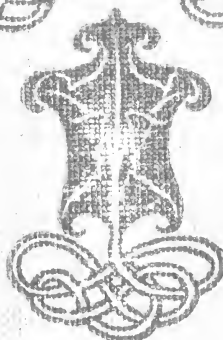
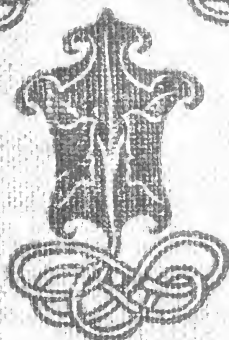
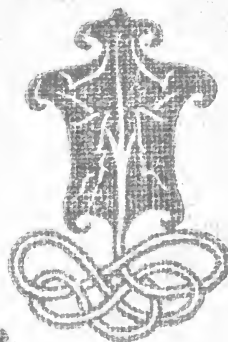
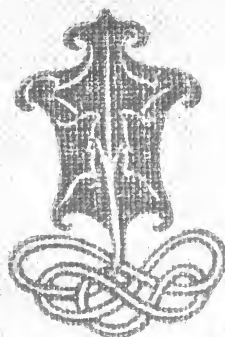
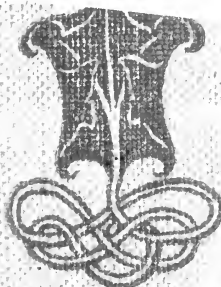


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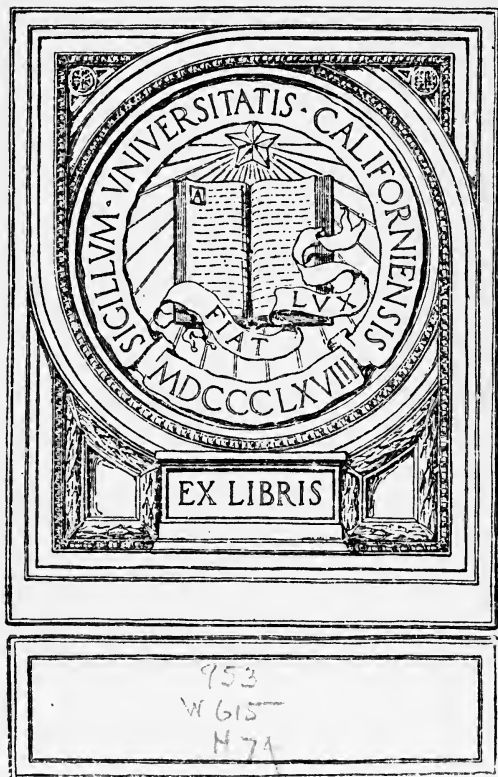
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WHITMAN



EDMOND  
HOLMES













WALT WHITMAN'S POETRY  
A STUDY & A SELECTION

*By the Same Author*

THE SILENCE OF LOVE

*Fifth Thousand*

WHAT IS POETRY? AN ESSAY



WALT WHITMAN'S POETRY  
A STUDY & A SELECTION

BY

EDMOND HOLMES

JOHN LANE, THE BODLEY HEAD  
LONDON & NEW YORK MDCCCCII

Printed by  
Richard Folkard & Son,  
Devonshire Street, London, W.C.

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## WALT WHITMAN'S POETRY

WHENEVER I find that an imaginative writer is either idolised or derided, I always assume, before I begin to study him, that he has a very strong personality, and that the right attitude towards him is (in all probability) one neither of blind enthusiasm nor of angry ridicule, but of warm admiration, tempered by intermittent antipathy. It was under the influence of this conviction that I first began to study Walt Whitman,—the best loved and best hated of modern poets; and though in literature, as in other matters, one's assumptions are apt to dominate one's experience, I think I can honestly say that in this particular case my experience fully verified my assumptions. For, long before I had finished that extraordinary work (poem I cannot call it), the *Song of Myself*, I felt that I was face to face with an abnormally vivid and aggressive personality by which I was alternately, not to

say simultaneously, fascinated and repelled. Had Whitman been a lesser man, I should have read his poetry, admired its beauties, laughed at its eccentricities, shuddered at its crudities, and then laid the book aside and gone on to something else. But the very fact that his personality seemed to be ever wrestling with and striving to impose itself upon mine, made me determine at all costs to understand him, to discover the secret sources of his poetry, to wrest from him the key to his heart and mind.

There are many ways in which we may set to work to interpret an author in whom we happen to be interested. The best way is, I think, to study his writings, half-attentively, half-broodingly, until some of the more salient of their characteristics have detached themselves from the rest and impressed themselves strongly on our minds,—such characteristics, let us say, as are bound to disclose themselves, sooner or later, to every thoughtful reader. Using these as our base of operations, we may then advance inferentially into the unknown country which we wish to explore, taking care to secure our communications as we proceed, by verifying from our author's writings every conclusion that we reach. We must beware (let me say in passing) of allowing ourselves to be deluded by the semblance of logic which our work of

research will inevitably wear. The movement of a poet's thought and feeling is always more or less circular, its starting-post and its goal being that primary attitude towards "things-in-general" which constitutes his idiosyncrasy in the region of his inner life. The different characteristics of his mind, so far as it reveals itself in his poetry, are all vitally interconnected; and though we find it convenient and even necessary to regard one of these as cause and others as effects, we know well enough (or at any rate we ought to know) that this is a mere matter of notation, and that what we are really trying to do is to show that a secret and quasi-organic logic gives unity and coherence to the whole of the poet's work.

To determine the leading characteristics of a strong personality like Whitman's is a comparatively easy task. (It is impossible to read Whitman's poetry with any degree of attention without seeing clearly that he is intensely *emotional*, intensely *self-conscious*, intensely *optimistic* and intensely *American*.) These are his most prominent characteristics; and so entirely do they dominate the movement of his poetic life, that there is nothing in his poetry—no beauty, no eccentricity, no height of wisdom, no depth of folly—which they cannot help us to understand and account for.

Whitman's *emotionalness* is—thanks to his self-consciousness—only too apparent. Other poets are compelled by their artistic instinct to impose on themselves some measure of reserve and self-restraint; but Whitman seems almost to glory in “wearing his heart upon his sleeve,” in unveiling all its wounds and weaknesses, all its passions and sympathies, to his own gaze and to ours. Everything that he has written is the overflow of strong feeling, and is to that extent worthy of the sacred name of poetry. The most beautiful, because the most sincere and spontaneous, of all his writings is (as it seems to me) a poem which he has named after its first line “Out of the cradle endlessly rocking,” but to which he might well have given the title of “Love and Death.” From first to last this poem thrills and glows with profound and passionate emotion; and I cannot imagine anyone reading it without feeling that its author had been endowed with no ordinary measure of true poetic fire.

When I say that Whitman is *self-conscious*, I do not merely mean that he is very fond of using the pronoun *I*. Many a poet has spoken much about himself and yet been naïvely unconscious. The Hebrew prophet is ever obtruding his personality upon us; but he regards himself as the mouthpiece of the Lord,



and is not conscious of anything about himself except that the Divine afflatus has taken possession of him and that he is overshadowed by the Most High. Whitman's egoism is of a different type from this. He is self-conscious in the fullest sense of the word. He turns the light of a strong consciousness on all that he thinks, on all that he feels, on all that he does, on all that he is. He is conscious of his own personality, conscious of his mission, conscious of his aims, conscious of his methods, conscious of his ideas, conscious of his theories, conscious of his very formulæ. He introduces himself to us as

"Walt Whitman, a kosmos, of Manhattan the son,  
Turbulent, fleshy, sensual, eating, drinking and  
breeding, &c.

The Hebrew prophet is content to tell us that "the word of the Lord came to him." In his own eyes he is nothing, and the word of the Lord is everything.

Whitman's *optimism* is of the best and most lasting kind, being no mere theory or conviction but the direct outcome of physical and spiritual joy. The saying "out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh" is pre-eminently applicable to the Poet; and it is with joy, first and foremost, that Whitman's heart overflows. He has indeed his fleeting

moments of doubts and despondency ; but, taken as a whole, his poetry is a veritable pæan, a song of thanksgiving and triumph. Here again he shows himself to be a true poet ; for the fountain-head of poetry is perception of the half-hidden beauty of Nature, and beauty must needs generate joy in all who are able to discern it.

The flood of Whitman's optimism flows in many channels, but in none more strongly or more permanently than in the channel of his *Americanism*, his enthusiastic faith in the social and political constitution of the United States.

Having defined the leading characteristics of Whitman's poetic personality, let us now try to forecast their practical consequences ; let us ask ourselves to what extent and in what directions they are likely to affect the development of Whitman's poetic genius.

The combination of intense emotionalness with intense self-consciousness is very rare and is sure to produce remarkable results. The self-conscious poet is naturally disposed to take himself very seriously and to think that all his feelings are worth recording. Poetry has been well defined as the "spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings." That the overflow should be spontaneous is quite as important as that the

feelings should be powerful. The self-conscious poet imagines that he has full control over the fire-springs of his heart. If his feelings happen to overflow, well and good. If not, he will deliberately pump them up and pour them out. When this happens, when he takes into his own hands a work which he ought to leave to the Muse, the chances are that feeling of the wrong sort, feeling which is not genuinely poetical, will find its way into his verse.

For, to begin with, in his desire to give expression to all his feelings, the self-conscious poet is apt to go very far afield. Everyone who has ever communed with his own heart knows well that it is haunted by strange and obscure feelings, some transient, others more or less permanent,—vaporous feelings which now and again condense into evanescent flakes of cloud, but which remain for the most part (like a thin haze on a summer's day) formless, indeterminate and almost imperceptible. That these feelings are genuine will be admitted by all who have ever experienced them; and some of us will even affirm that for passing moments they are intensely vivid and real. But those who are most familiar with them will be the first to insist that words cannot do justice to them, and that they cannot be communicated to other minds. It does not follow that they are

meaningless. They are symptomatic of real movements of our inner being; and it may well be that they give us hints and suggestions to which our inner life owes much. It is clear then that they cannot be ignored; and as it is equally clear that they cannot be adequately expressed, common sense seems to demand that he who experiences them should keep them to himself, in the belief that, if they are really worth expressing, they will eventually, in the natural course of their development, win expression for themselves. But this is what a self-conscious poet, like Whitman, cannot bring himself to do. He is the last man in the world to consume his own smoke. He insists on communicating to us every wisp and speck of emotion, and he even tries to put us in possession of all that floating haze of feeling, out of which, if it has any meaning, his desires and passions, his thoughts and fancies are being gradually shaped. In his attempt to do this, the outward form of his poetry is sure to suffer: for if all his feelings are to be accurately expressed, his medium of expression must, as far as possible, be free from trammels and restrictions; in other words, it must be quite lawless and even formless. It is not so much inability to write metrical and musical verse that constrains Whitman to adopt his favourite

*recitative* (if that is its correct title) as desire for perfect freedom. He forgets that the freedom which is not strong enough to submit to the control of law is not really free, that it is ever tending to degenerate into unbridled license. Were he to adopt a harmonious and beautiful form for his poetry, his obscurer feelings, in their attempts to adapt themselves to it, would either disappear from view or be entirely transformed. One of the advantages of artistic form in poetry is that it makes for reserve and self-control. The poet has to keep back part of what he feels; and this intensifies the effect of what he says. His readers feel that there is much behind his words, and their own sympathetic imagination is stimulated by his reticence. Another advantage of artistic form is that it compels the poet to introduce (of course more or less unconsciously) order and harmony into the seething *mélée* of his obscurer feelings, and so lifts those feelings above the level of mere potentiality by giving them formative centres round which they may rally and re-organise their scattered forces.

It is, I suppose, vain to wish that a great man had been other than he actually was, or even to speculate on what he might have been had he chosen to develop himself in this direction rather than that. (Still I cannot but

think that Whitman's deeper and larger feelings would have done themselves more justice than his words have done them had they been compelled to express themselves in a beautiful form; that they would have revealed themselves more clearly and more truly than they do now had they been freed from all that medley of grotesque fancies, from all those rags and tatters of chaotic passion, from which Whitman, in the excess of his self-consciousness, is unable to dissociate them. Also, I cannot but think that through the half-sensuous, half-spiritual emotion which charm of rhythm and metre is sure to kindle, he would have awakened feelings akin to his own in many hearts which must ever remain beyond the reach of his influence.

\ The self-conscious poet thinks that all his feelings are worth recording. But if he finds that in trying to record them he has taken upon himself a task which "exceeds man's might," if he finds that he must discriminate amongst them, he will as far as possible superintend this work himself. He will not allow his feelings to sift and organise themselves as they would do, if he were less of a thinker and more of an artist, under the control and guidance of the feeling which ought to be paramount in his heart,—the love of and desire for ideal beauty. He takes (or imagines that he takes) the control

of his inner life into his own hands, and deliberately tries to interpret himself to his fellow men. In making this attempt there are at least two directions in which he is liable to go astray. As the searchlight of his consciousness falls on his inner life, he realises that the play of his strongest passions is far removed from those correct and conventional feelings which constitute the emotional life of so many excellent souls; and this sense of aloofness from the world of tradition and routine fills him with a desire to break loose from restraints of every sort, and start afresh.

“O to escape utterly from others’ anchors and holds!” exclaims Whitman :

“O something pernicious and dread !

Something far away from a puny and pious life !

Something unproved ! Something in a trance !

Something escaped from the anchorage and driving free.”

This desire is one with which every poetical nature does and must sympathise : for the poet, with the vision of ideal beauty floating before his inward eye, is always in a state of partial revolt against what is established and accepted, and is always striving to liberate himself and us from the despotism of custom and convention. But it is possible for this desire for a new start and a new life to be carried too far ; and the

self-conscious poet is of all men the most likely to carry it too far, for in becoming aware of it he instinctively throws the whole weight of his consciousness on its side, supporting it with all the forces of thought and feeling that are in any degree under his control. Whitman's desire to "escape utterly from others' anchors and holds" will carry him very far: it will lead him to sigh for a "world primal again," and do his best to realise his dream: it will lead him to strip off from himself all those garments which Nature herself has woven through myriads of years,—the delicacy, the reserve, the reticence, the self-control with which civilised men veil from one another their grosser and more animal souls: it will lead him at last to perpetrate strange outrages—always with the best of intentions and in no spirit of prurience or even of coarseness—on decency, on good taste and (last but not least) on the common sense of Humanity.

This then is one way in which the self-conscious poet will sift and arrange his feelings. He will reject as unworthy of attention all the feelings that seem to range themselves on the side of what is established and accepted, and will attach undue importance to those that are struggling to escape from their anchorage and drive free. But this is not the only way. The self-conscious mind is always liable to



be dominated by theories of various kinds,—political, social, æsthetic, metaphysical, and so forth : and the man who combines a self-conscious mind with a passionate heart will hold his theories, whatever they may be, not lightly, as a more frivolous man might do ; not half-jestingly, as a man with a keen sense of humour might do ; not “ notionally,” as a mere theorist might do ; but with the whole-hearted earnestness of an intense and enthusiastic nature. It is easy to see that when such a man tries to interpret his own deeper and obscurer feelings, he will be tempted to read into them the theory that dominates his mind, and (if he happens to be a poet) to make this theory, rather than his dream of ideal beauty, the presiding genius of his poetic life. No more fatal step could possibly be taken. Social and political prejudices are things of to-day. They come and go. Beauty and the pursuit of beauty are eternal. The poetry that is composed under the influence of a theory is charged from its very birth with the germs of decay and death.

Now it happens, most unfortunately as I must think, that Whitman brings to the interpretation of his deeper feelings a politico-social theory which he holds with all the strength of his ardent temperament. A theory I call it, but it is far more than a mere theory. It is a

✓ fervent conviction that Democracy (as exemplified in the social and political constitution of the United States) is an ideal form of government and an ideal state of society. Whitman's faith in Democracy is touching in its *naïveté*. Here is one expression of it.

“I was looking a long while for Intentions,  
For a clew to the history of the past for myself and for  
those chants—and now I have found it.

It is in Democracy—(the purport and aim of all the  
past).”

“*Sancta Simplicitas!*” one may well murmur when one reads such words as these. Is this indeed the final cause of all things? The Multi-millionaire, the worship of the Almighty Dollar, the Wheat Corner, the Ice Trust, the Tammany Ring and all its congeners,—is the system that has borne such fruits as these (let its achievements in other directions be what they may) the veritable end and aim of human progress?

I am not going to discuss the merits and demerits of Democracy. I have a sincere admiration for the political constitution of the United States, but I cannot think that wisdom said its last word when that constitution was framed. I have a sincere admiration for the people of the United States, but I cannot think (and I am

sure they do not think) that their social condition is within measurable distance of perfection. Feudalism had its work to do and did it. Democracy has its work to do and will do it. Systems come and go, but the ideal of the soul remains. Some day, perhaps, we shall have a higher Feudalism, in which wisdom (in the Platonic sense of the world) will be the supreme authority, and love—a love which is near of kin to reverence—will be the only fountain of force. And in that golden age we shall perhaps look back to Democracy with the pity (though not, I hope, with the contempt) with which the whole-hearted Democrat looks back to the Feudalism of Mediæval Europe.

But be that as it will. One thing is clear, namely: that the politico-social ideal, like every other ideal, is unattainable, and that the poet who regards Democracy or any other form of government as the *τέλος τελειότατον* of "all the past," is guilty of treason to his Muse, who dwells in his heart as a vision of ideal beauty, and who will assuredly cease to inspire him if he allows himself to accept as final any achievement of the spirit of man.

Let us now ask ourselves how Whitman's politico-social prejudices are likely to affect his poetry. The cardinal doctrine of Democracy

is that all men are equal. Whitman pushes this doctrine to its extreme limits, and follows it out into all its consequences. His deification of the "average man" is of course, mathematically speaking, absurd. An average is struck among unequals, not among equals. If all things were equal, the notion of an average would never have been generated. But though Whitman, having adopted a technical term, has deliberately ignored its technical meaning, to criticise his poetry from a mathematical standpoint would scarcely be fair and would certainly be futile. An "average" is an entirely different thing from a "common factor;" but whenever Whitman uses the former term it is quite clear (from the context) that he is intending to use the latter, that he has in his mind some "common factor" of man's being, some common element in human nature, the possession of which lifts the lowest of men to the level of the highest.

What is this common element in human nature which Whitman apostrophises as divine? For an answer to this question we must turn to Whitman's prose works. One of the many objections to theorising in poetry is that the poet cannot, as a poet, even begin to do justice to his theories. For theories need to be first expounded, and then supported with arguments; and there is no place either for exposition

(properly so called) or for argument in poetry. A great poet who happens also to be a great artist (perhaps no poet is truly great who is not also a great artist) may be able by some "heavenly alchemy" to transmute a philosophical theory into a spiritual idea; and having done this he may be able to bring it home to our hearts by illustration, by suggestion, by the revelation of it in gleams and flashes, by the prismatic decomposition of its abstract light. But a poet, like Whitman, whose artistic instincts are as weak as his poetic emotions are strong, must present a theory to us in its abstract nakedness or not at all. In other words, since explanation and argument are forbidden to him, he must give us a crude one-sided statement of the theory by which his mind may happen to be dominated, and then champion this naked and inadequate formula with all the zeal and vehemence of a prophet. Or, if he does attempt to illustrate his theory, he will draw outrageously paradoxical inferences from it and submit these to us as self-evident truths. When one has vainly tried to come to terms with Whitman's doctrine of the "divine average" and universal equality, as expounded in *Leaves of Grass*, and then turned to the prose essay called *Democratic Vistas*, in which he handles the same theme (an essay, let me say

in passing, which is the work of a chaotic thinker and incoherent writer), one cannot but feel that the prose exposition, with all its faults, is by many degrees more lucid than the poetical. At any rate it is sufficiently lucid to enable one to criticise its author's philosophy. In a remarkable passage in *Democratic Vistas* Whitman tells us that democracy is to do for mankind in the socio-political field what Christ did for it "in the moral-spiritual field," namely to convince it that "in respect to the absolute soul there is in the possession of such by each single individual something so transcendent, so *incapable of gradations (like life)*, that, to that extent it places all beings on a common level, utterly regardless of the distinctions of intellect, virtue, station or any height or lowliness whatever." There is a deep truth in this sentence; but it is vitiated, in all its depth, by a subtle error. The words that I have emphasised are all-important, for they show that the doctrine of universal equality is based (in Whitman's mind) on the assumption that spiritual life, like physical, is "incapable of gradations." Whether physical life is or is not "capable of gradations" is a verbal problem which I will not attempt to solve; but that life (both physical and spiritual) is capable of *development*, and that in the course of its development it passes through innumer-

able phases and stages, is a truth too obvious to need demonstration. But if it is a truth, the psychology that underlies Whitman's "sovereign dogma" is false. All men are equal because all men have souls; but in respect of their souls men are all unequal, being all in different stages of spiritual development. It follows that the universal equality on which Whitman lays so much stress is potential, not actual. All men are equal and all men are divine because, though all men are unequal and no man is divine, the chief source of their inequality is also the chief source of their manhood and the surest proof of their kinship to God; for what is common to all men, and therefore of the inmost essence of human nature, is not the "average" but the germ of the ideal,—and the ideal is divine.

Thus it is only from the standpoint of the ideal that we can see a meaning in Whitman's master theory. But the theory itself, as expounded by Whitman in his poetry, is at open feud with the ideal and with all that the pursuit of an ideal involves. If all men are actually equal, it is clear that there are certain qualities of our complex nature which have no right to exist. Humility, reverence, adoration, aspiration,—what function do these fulfil if one man is as good as another and if "there is no God any more divine" than one's individual self?

Whitman sees clearly enough that if there is nothing ideal in human nature, there can be nothing ideal above human nature, and therefore that, if all men are equal, each man in turn is an "incredible God." The idealistic conception of the potential equality of all men is an argument in support of his favourite paradox which he would certainly disdain to use. For it is the presence, in an embryonic state, of the ideal self in our hearts that convicts us of imperfection and inclines us to humility; and humility is, in Whitman's eyes, the first and last of human vices. It is strange, to say the least, that one who is bound by the charter of his very idiosyncrasy to tolerate all things, and who certainly tolerates many things that are commonly accounted evil, should be intolerant of humility and all the feelings that are akin to it, should be intolerant, in other words, of one great natural phenomenon,—of the struggle of the soul to lift itself above itself in the direction of its inward and spiritual ideal.

Whitman's hatred of humility will have far-reaching consequences. It will compel him at last to

avert his ken  
From half of human fate.

The function of the Poet is to liberate the human spirit, to free it from the control of its



narrower and more sordid self, by enabling it, in each individual case, to escape through the channel of disinterested emotion into the larger life of Humanity and of Nature. Hence it is that joy is of the essence of poetic genius. Pessimism is always self-centred. Despair is the darkness of a self-regarding and self-imprisoned soul. But joy in its purest form is an ecstasy, a transporting of the soul beyond its wonted limits; and its presence is a proof that the soul is trying to outgrow itself and has already won some measure of freedom. As Whitman's heart overflows with exultant joy, it is certain that his will be a liberating influence, that he will work with energy and enthusiasm for the emancipation of the human spirit. But in what direction will his influence exert itself? Through what outlet will he pour his soul (and help us to pour our souls) abroad?

It will be easy for us to find an answer to this question. In the act of escaping from its narrower self, the soul necessarily expands its being. *Escape from self, emancipation of self, and expansion of self* are in fact interchangeable terms. And in the case of a living thing expansion always takes the form of growth. The Poet helps us to grow. This is the most concise account that we can give of his mission. Intensely alive himself, he is ever tending to

vitalise us ; and the proof of vitality is continuous growth. Now the growth of the soul, if it is to be harmonious and complete, should resemble that of a stately tree ; in other words it should be both *upward* and *outward*. The tree that develops itself under perfectly favourable conditions grows upward by means of its aspiring "leader" and outward by means of its innumerable branches ; and these two processes are not merely contemporaneous but proportioned to and in a manner dependent on one another. When trees are planted close together, their struggle for light and air carries them up to great heights, but they put forth very few branches. Such trees are unsymmetrical and imperfect. Their development is one-sided,—upward but not outward. When a tree has been "pollarded"—when its "leader" has been excised—it throws great energy into its lateral growth, but its upward growth is entirely arrested. Like the branchless giant, the pollarded tree is unsymmetrical and imperfect. Its development is one-sided,—outward but not upward.

It is the same with the growth of the soul. Growth, whatever form it may assume, is always the outward and visible sign of an inward and invisible force. In the case of the soul this inward and invisible force is *love*. Now love

is of two kinds, or rather it energises in two principal directions. On the one hand there is love of the ideal, the love that lifts us above ourselves, the love that humbles us even while it exalts us, the love that is partly compounded of reverence and that looks in the direction of worship. We call this upward movement of love aspiration. On the other hand, there is love of the actual, the love that carries us outside ourselves, the love that neither humbles us nor exalts us, the love that makes us regard all things as our kith and kin. We call this outward movement of love sympathy. In the soul that is growing as it ought to grow—harmoniously and symmetrically—both kinds of love are strong and active, and neither is allowed to develop itself to the exclusion or even to the detriment of the other.

Even on its more human and personal side love presents this dual aspect. Thus on the one hand we have the passionate love of another human soul, the love that is ever tending to idealise its object, the love that is not truly love until it has begun to transform itself into adoration. And on the other hand we have comradeship, the love of one's fellow men as one's companions and equals, the love of each man as he actually is. There ought to be room in the same heart for both these movements of

love. Indeed it may be doubted if either love has found its true self until it has begun to assimilate itself to the other. It may be doubted if the lover loves his mistress perfectly until he has learned to love all men for her sake ; and it may be doubted if the philanthropist loves his fellow men perfectly until he has learned to look up, with an adoring love, to the common ideal of Humanity.

It is easy to see in which direction Whitman's emancipating influence will exert itself. His political prejudices will forbid him to look upward.

"What do you suppose I would intimate to you in a hundred ways

But that man or woman is as good as God,  
And that there is no God any more divine than yourself."

This is no random utterance. It is in strict accordance with the general tenor of his teaching. To tell Man that he has attained to absolute perfection (the words "as good as God" mean this or they mean nothing) is to discredit and discountenance the latent idealism of his heart. Whitman's sincere hatred of humility will make him impatient of spiritual aspiration and incapable of understanding the passion of adoring love. Debarred by one of his strongest convictions from trying to rise above

himself, and yet impelled by his poetic nature to try to escape from himself, he will seek the outlet of outward growth,—he will become the Poet Laureate of sympathy and comradeship. And because the outlet of upward growth is closed against him, and because he is by nature intense and vehement beyond measure, he will throw himself with extraordinary force and energy into the work of outward growth; though his “leader” has been excised, or rather because his leader has been excised, he will put forth innumerable branches and a most luxuriant growth of twigs and leaves.

The desire to escape from self, which is of the essence of the poetic nature, has its counterpart in a desire to merge one's being in the life of the Universe (regarded as a living whole), to become one with the very “soul of things.” This “soul of things” is in us quite as much as it is outside us, and so far as it is in us it is the object of aspiration and adoring love. For Whitman it is outside,—in Time and Space, in the average man, in the animal world, in inanimate nature. To become one with all these, to merge his being in theirs, to clasp them to his heart, to absorb them into himself—is the master passion of his life. Towards the end of a poem on the music of Nature and of Art (“Proud Music of the Storm”) he exclaims—



identify himself with each thing in turn, till he has exhausted the Universe and made it all his own. This is the explanation of those tedious catalogues, often of sordid and unlovely things, which are so repugnant to one's artistic sense. Whitman is trying to make an inventory of the contents of the Universe, so that he may make us understand what he really is. "O lands" he cries "all so dear to me,—what you are, whatever it is, I putting it at random in these songs, become a part of that, whatever it is" (he then proceeds to identify himself with gulls, herons, king-birds, wild geese, the moose, &c.) "Nativities, climates, the grass of the great Pastoral plains, cities, labors, death, animals, products, war, good and evil, *these me.*" He is the "hounded slave," the "wounded person," the "mashed fireman," the "handcuffed mutineer," the "cholera patient," and so forth. His lateral growth, now that his inconvenient "leader" has been excised, is indeed enormous. Each detail of the outward life is sacred in his eyes, glorious, wonderful, divine. He longs to make it his own, to give himself to it, to unite its being with his. Well may he go into raptures over the "vast elemental sympathy which only the human soul is capable of generating and emitting in steady and limitless floods!" "Vast elemental sympathy" with all outward things, animate

and inanimate, and (in particular) a feeling of impassioned comradeship with all his fellow-men,—these are the dominant emotions that overflow into his verse. It is to be hoped that they will continue to come forth in “steady and limitless floods,” for there is evidently much work for them to do. What gives them their peculiar character is that they are not modified, even in the faintest degree, by aspiration, by spiritual love. The divorce between the ideal and the actual is complete in Whitman’s mind. The glory, the splendour, the divinity, which we instinctively ascribe to the ideal, he transfers or tries to transfer to every detail of the actual. Frankest and most consistent of Pantheists, he deifies Nature, not in her totality, not in the unity of her infinite life, but in all the minutiae of her phenomenal existence.

But does this vast overflow of elemental sympathy bring him any nearer to the “soul of things?” I think not. If each detail of the actual is really divine, the “soul of things” is ready to his hand, and he need not range over the whole Universe in quest of it. (But if it is not to be found in the first detail that he meets, it is not to be found in a billion details, and the attempt to catalogue the contents of the Universe had better be abandoned as futile.) The “soul of things” is the soul of Nature, and



Nature is "not an aggregate but a whole." A whole and a living whole,—a living, growing, organic whole. As such it is like the tree to which I have likened the human soul. However vast may be its lateral expansion, still through all the breadth and complexity of its growth it aspires upward (by means of its central leader), and the highest point that it attains is, as regards the totality of its being, both central and supreme. He does not see Nature as she really is who cannot look upward towards that ideal height; but in order to look upward one must be able to look inward, for the higher life of this living whole which we call Nature is (humanly speaking) in the spirit of man, and reveals itself to man's spiritual senses. It will perhaps be said that this conception justifies Whitman's deification of humanity. But then he expressly deifies the "average man," the actual self; and it is not in the actual but in the ideal self that the "soul of things," so far as it is inward and spiritual, has its appointed home. Indeed, if choice had to be made between upward and outward growth, it would be better for us to choose the former; for it offers us a direct, though interminable, road to our goal, whereas if we follow the road of outward growth, for its own sake alone, we run the risk of losing

ourselves in a labyrinth. But we are never called upon to make this fatal choice. In the life of Nature the two movements are not two, but one. It is the whole tree—the soaring stem, with its immense outgrowth of branches—that is ever struggling upward through the central leader. Aspiration, when divorced from sympathy, is aspiration no longer, but a refined form of selfishness; and sympathy, when divorced from aspiration, is sympathy no longer, but the mere overflow of animal “high spirits.” Each mode of growth has need of the other; and love has need of both.

Is it through sympathy alone that we make our way to the soul of outward things, the soul of inanimate Nature? No, for the soul of things, as it burns through the veil of outward Nature, reveals itself to us under the guise of beauty; and beauty always presents itself to the heart that discerns it as an unrealised ideal, as a vision which lures one onward, as the object of aspiring love. Nor is it with the eye alone that the lover of outward Nature sees the beauty of what he admires (if it were, beauty would be as palpable as colour) but with an inward and spiritual sense by means of which his soul looks through his eyes, just as the soul of outward things looks through the veil of what is visible, and makes it luminous and beautiful.

It is an outrage on common sense to say that each detail of the material universe is divine, glorious, beautiful, wonderful, perfect. Considered as details, very few of the things that lie around us are beautiful, and many of them are sordid and even repulsive. The details of outward nature must be grouped into artistic wholes, if their hidden beauty is to become manifest, and this work of grouping must be done by the percipient eye under the guidance of the spirit's dream of ideal beauty. So needful is it that the outward movement of the soul should be supported at every turn by the upward (or inward) movement; and so useless is it to seek for the soul of things in the chaotic multiplicity of the actual!

I am trying to show that Whitman's passionate desire to merge his being in that of the Universe is thwarted by his refusal to look upward, and by his consequent inability to use the outlet of upward growth. The exuberance of his outward growth avails him nothing. The tree that continues to grow upward has in reality a larger and more harmonious outward growth than the tree that has sacrificed its "leader" in order that it may throw all its expansive energy into the development of its branches. Until Whitman can bring himself to look upward, he will be blind to the ideal side of Nature; and

until he can idealise the actual, instead of accepting and deifying its actuality, the "soul of things" (though he follow it through a million details) will continue to elude him. The man who can say that there will never be any more perfection than there is now has fatally misconceived of Nature, whose being is essentially a *life*, and whose life expresses itself in eternal growth.

If Whitman's "vast elemental sympathy" is an inadequate outlet for the soul that desires to escape from self, if even its "steady and limitless floods" are unable to bring him into oneness with the "soul of things," what will his sense of comradeship—the more human side of his vast sympathy—do for him? For Whitman the man it will no doubt do much. Indeed, if we may accept his own account of himself, it will do everything. Of Whitman's life it is impossible to speak except in terms of reverential admiration. And no doubt he would tell us that it was the sense of comradeship and nothing more that made him, through the dark and weary years of the great Civil War, the friend, the nurse, and the consoler of thousands of wounded and dying men. But I must be allowed to believe that he was inspired by a deeper and more spiritual emotion than this. We shall presently see that, in defiance of his

political and social theories, he was at heart (after a fashion of his own) an ardent idealist ;\* and I cannot but think that there was a strong strain of idealism in the sympathy that made him do so much, at so great a cost to himself, for his fellow men.

But we need not pause to discuss this question. It is with the Whitman of the "vision and the faculty divine" that we are now concerned, not with the Whitman of the Civil War. For the latter comradeship is a motive to action. For the former it is a faith, a dream, a spiritual idea. What is the value of this new religion which Whitman is commissioned to reveal? Is the Gospel of Comradeship an adequate substitute for, or an adequate interpretation of, the Gospel of Love? \ It is as such that Whitman preaches it. ( Of the higher and more spiritual movements of love he knows nothing. ) The passion of adoring love—such a love as a man might feel for a high-souled woman—he does not understand and is content to ignore. The reason of this is that some strain of reverence always enters into such a passion. When two

\* We must always draw a distinction between Whitman the self-conscious thinker and Whitman the spontaneous poet. While the former is deifying the actual, the latter is, unknown to himself, dreaming of the ideal; and sooner or later he will become conscious of his dream.

human beings love one another perfectly, they do not love as equals. Each looks up to the other. For though each loves, and passionately loves, the actual self of the other, his love is not limited to this. Love, which is the greatest of all seers and initiators, gradually unveils to the lover's eyes the beloved one's ideal self ; and as this higher and purer beauty begins to dawn upon him, something of reverence and adoration begins to weave itself into his love. We laugh at love for idealising its object ; but love is wiser than we are. By idealising its object it both proves the continuance of its own growth and tests the sincerity of its passion. An unworthy passion cannot idealise ; a misdirected passion withers away when the test of idealisation is applied to it. But the love that survives the test, that grows stronger the more ardently it idealises its object, is, we may be sure, making a not wholly unsuccessful effort to see the Beloved as she really is. Whitman does not understand this. Whenever love is compounded in any degree of reverence, whenever it ascends towards an ideal, whenever it is in the least akin to adoration, it passes beyond his comprehension and beyond his sympathy. Here, as elsewhere, the baneful influence of his politics makes itself felt. The soul that adores has committed the unpardonable offence of looking upward.

If men are to love one another, they must love as equals, in other words as *comrades*. Whitman's faith in comradeship is boundless. To teach men this new form of love is his self-imposed mission.

"I will sing the song of companionship

I write the evangel-poem of comrades and of love

For who but I should be the poet of comrades?"

Comradeship is to regenerate the human race.

"Come, I will make this continent indissoluble,  
I will make the most splendid race the world ever  
shone upon.

I will make divine magnetic lands  
With the love of comrades,  
With the lifelong love of comrades."

What is this new force which is to work these miracles? One has heard of the "enthusiasm of Humanity," and one sometimes meets with persons who seem to be consumed with love for their fellow men. But the "enthusiasm of Humanity" is really love of the ideal of Humanity; an ideal which is of the inmost essence of human nature and therefore potentially existent even in the basest of men; and it will be found that they love their fellow men best whose faith in the ideal is so strong that

they see some glow of its light in every human face. This however cannot be the love of comrades, for Whitman will have no commerce with the inward ideal. If we cannot love the actual average man for his own actual average sake, we have not been initiated into the mysteries of comradeship. But how are we to compel ourselves to love him if, as a matter of fact, he does not happen to attract us? If we love him before we know him, we are idealising him, loving him for the sake of the ideal nature that is in him and yet not of him. Whitman would, I presume, have us love the actual average man at sight, but it is in the highest degree unlikely that we shall find ourselves able to do so. The truth of the matter is that the sense of comradeship, when divorced from love of the ideal, is unworthy of the sacred name of love.\* At best it is a feeling of being

\* It is probable that in Whitman's "buried life" the sense of comradeship is never wholly divorced from love of the ideal. What he loves in each of his innumerable "comrades" is undoubtedly that common element which he miscalls the "average." I have elsewhere suggested that the "average" is really the "promise and potency" of the ideal. This explanation of Whitman's theory of universal equality would account for his glorification of comradeship quite as readily as for his deification of the "average man." But the explanation is one which Whitman himself would, of course, disown.



hail-fellow-well-met with the first man you meet, of being ready to like him and lend him a helping hand. Such a feeling, however worthy it may be, will not carry us very far, and may well carry us in the wrong direction. Experience has amply proved that comradeship which is not based on pursuit of a common ideal, comradeship which is wholly divorced from *reverence*, is apt to degenerate into companionship in evil. There is good-fellowship as well as "honour" "among thieves;" and the members of swindling gangs and plundering "trusts," of the Tammany and other corrupt municipal "Rings," of the Maffia and other secret assassination societies, are bound together by the closest ties of comradeship. The end, the purpose is everything; the mere fact of co-operation is nothing. A band of comrades may be a band of heroes; but they need not be anything better than a pack of ravenous wolves.

To misunderstand the nature of love is to misconceive of the mission of Woman. Nothing is so characteristic of Whitman's philosophy as the ignoble (not to say bestial) part that Woman plays in it. When she is not ignored, which is her usual fate, she is degraded and insulted. The maternal aspect of womanhood has indeed been glorified by Whitman, and the strong love that he felt for his own mother was (strange to

say!) not unmingled with reverence. But though he proclaims himself the poet of "amateness" and "animality," he does not even profess to be the poet of sexual *love*. Comradeship, which is his substitute for love, seems to be an essentially masculine institution. Comradeship among women, or between men and women, does not seem to be contemplated. Again and again love reveals itself to him as the solver of problems, the remover of doubts, the healer of wounds; but whenever this happens, the object of his love is a man, not a woman. Woman, as Whitman conceives of her, is the object of an animal passion on the part of man, and her sole function is to bear and rear children. With this end in view it is desirable that she should be a fine, healthy animal, the human equivalent of a prize brood-mare. She is to be muscular, brawny, supple, strong, and above all *arrogant*. Arrogance, the negation of humility and modesty, the most unfeminine of qualities, is her ideal characteristic. The spiritual rôle of Woman, the softening, refining and elevating influence that she exercises through the medium of love, is entirely ignored. There is surely something amiss with a philosophy which does such scant justice to half the human race. The brawny, arrogant, brood-mare woman is the *reductio ad absurdum* of Whitman's conception of love.

We can now see that the outward growth of a tree which has lost its "leader" and can no longer grow upward, is, *even as outward growth*, incomplete, unsymmetrical and unlovely. Sympathy, without aspiration, however vast and elemental it may be, cannot reach, cannot even begin to reach, the "soul of things," which is ever escaping from us, as we strive to clasp it, through the multitudinous meshes of the actual. Love, when divorced from reverence and adoration, sinks either to the level of comradeship (which may mean nothing more than companionship in evil) or of animal passion. In either case it ceases to be love.

So much as to what Whitman has failed to do. Let us now ask ourselves what he has succeeded in doing. We have seen that what is characteristic of his personality is its combination of extreme emotionalness with extreme self-consciousness, and that what is characteristic of his philosophy is its combination of exuberant optimism with an ardent belief in the democratic ideal of universal equality. These combinations of incongruous forces produce explosives of extraordinary strength. The former combination tends, as we have already seen, to make a chaos of Whitman's own thoughts and feelings. The latter tends, as we shall now see,

to make a chaos of the world which he loves so well.

Every poet is at heart an optimist, but no poet's heart was ever so full of the vibrating quasi-physical energy of joy as Whitman's. "Who has been happiest?" he cries out in one of his raptures, "O I think it is I—I think no one was ever happier than I. . . . And who has made hymns for the earth? For I am mad with devouring ecstasy to make hymns for the whole earth." Splendid as this joy is, there is something that it lacks. "Devouring ecstasies" are apt to be short-lived. If the tissue of our joy is to last, some threads of sadness must be woven into it. The optimism that underlies all true poetry is compounded of joy in the actual and faith in the ideal; but, as the ideal is ever tending to disparage the actual, there is always something of spiritual revolt, something of noble discontent in the poet's heart. His function is to find delight in the actual on account of the ideal beauty that glows through it, and at the same time to protest, in the name of the ideal beauty which has not yet revealed itself, against whatever claims to authority and finality the actual order of things may seem to advance. But Whitman's fervent belief in universal equality forbids him to draw distinctions in Nature, and

the flood of his joy must flow impartially round every existent thing.

There is however one fatal drawback to this all-embracing optimism. The heart that finds joy in everything is in imminent peril of finding joy in nothing. If all things are equally wonderful and glorious, is there any reason why we should call anything wonderful or glorious? These words suggest excellence, pre-eminence, supremacy; if this is not their meaning they are wholly meaningless. In a world in which there is "not a single imperfection," the primary distinction between good and evil inevitably vanishes. Whitman sees this clearly enough, and does not shrink from stating it. "Good or evil," he exclaims, "I do not question you—I love all—I do not condemn anything." "What is called good is perfect, and what is called evil is just as perfect." "I make the poem of evil also, I commemorate that part also, I am myself just as much evil as good, and my nation is—and I say there is in fact no evil." But if good and evil are interchangeable terms, if evil equally with good is "perfect," it is surely immaterial which term we apply to things. One whose temperament is joyous will call the whole world good; one whose temperament is gloomy will call the whole world evil; and the optimism of the former is not a whit

more reasonable than the pessimism of the latter.

The truth is that such words as *good* and *evil* are correlative terms, each of which postulates the other, and has no meaning apart from it. To say that everything is good is exactly the same as to say that everything is evil. To say that everything is beautiful is exactly the same as to say that everything is ugly. If Cæsar Borgia is as good as St. Francis of Assisi, it is an insult to St. Francis to revere his goodness. If Thersites is as beautiful as Adonis, it is an insult to Adonis to admire his beauty. The doctrine of equality would speedily reduce any community that tried to practise it to a state of chaos. It would do the same to the Universe. Organisation is of the essence of life ; and organisation implies subordination of means to ends, and of parts (through an infinite gradation of means and ends) to the central purpose of the whole. Evolution has been defined as a movement "from loose incoherent homogeneity to close coherent heterogeneity," in other words, from an infinity of similars and equals to an organic whole. The idea of universal equality makes at last for pure atomism. (I am assuming that atoms are all similar and equal ; but I am told that even they repudiate the doctrine of universal equality.) Serious

criticism of such a doctrine is out of place. Our author is playing fast and loose with language ; in other words he is deliberately ignoring the laws and properties of the material that he uses. Behind the wild and bewildering word-jugglery in which he indulges we see one thing and one only, namely that his optimism is vainly struggling to bring itself into harmony with his faith in equality.

The end of this struggle is, I repeat, chaos. Good and evil, beauty and ugliness, pleasure and pain, joy and sorrow, play the part in the world of human life or (to use a word which will cover both outward and inward Nature) in the Cosmos, which light and darkness, with all the gradations of colour, play in the material universe. Imagine an outward world in which light were the same as darkness, and you get some idea of what the Cosmos would be like if good and evil were interchangeable terms. The antitheses of soul and body, of spirit and matter, are of course as unreal in Whitman's eyes as that of good and evil. The soul is the body. "Behold the body includes and is the main meaning, the main concern, and includes and is the soul." The spiritual is the material. "The poems of materials" are "the most spiritual poems." The universe is being uncreated, disintegrated before our very eyes. Well may

Whitman sigh "for a world primal again." He is doing his best to realise his desire. And well may another poet remind us that

"It takes the ideal to blow a hair's breadth off  
The dust of the actual."

Nature is either a chaos or an organic whole. If it is an organic whole, there must needs be something in it which is both central and supreme, some paramount end to which all its parts (in their infinite gradation and complexity) are subordinated, and for the sake of which they live and work. Withdraw the conception of what is central and supreme, of what claims our reverence, our devotion, and our desire,—withdraw the master thread of the *ideal*, and the fabric of Nature unweaves itself with startling rapidity, and the Cosmos transforms itself into a Chaos.

It is by cancelling the category of the beautiful that Whitman's political bias does most harm both to his poetry and to his philosophy. In a world in which every detail is divinely beautiful there can be no such thing as beauty. Whitman's optimistic belief that the world is beautiful is one with which we can all sympathise. Faith in the intrinsic loveliness of Nature is indeed one of the strongest and surest sources of poetic inspiration. But this faith is the out-



come of prophetic hope as well as of actual experience. One element in it (and that the most essential) is the poet's undying conviction that the real loveliness of Nature has not unveiled itself to him, and never will. If he should ever come to believe that what he saw and felt was the whole of Nature's beauty, the light that gladdens him would be eclipsed, and the joy that inspires him would be changed to despair. In his heart of hearts, in the depths of his buried life, Whitman knows this better than most of us ; but the despotism of the doctrine of equality compels him to ascribe to each detail of Nature the divine attributes of the totality of things, and therefore to see the perfection of beauty in each material thing. Had he been less of a thinker and more of an artist, he would have stopped short of this impossible conclusion. But if we may say, as perhaps we may, that in every poetic nature there are two principal elements, the prophetic and the artistic, we must, I think, admit that in Whitman the prophet (or emotional thinker) completely overshadows the artist. Not that his heart is dead, or even callous, to the influence of beauty. Far from it. His sensitive and sympathetic nature is keenly alive to the profound and subtle charms of outward Nature ; and whenever his emotions are so strongly quickened by what he sees and hears

as to be able to swamp his self-consciousness, he shows himself to be a word-painter (in the larger sense of the word) of extraordinary power and skill. But he has neither the patience nor the self-forgetfulness of the true artist. His reaction on his experiences is, as a rule, immediate and intentional. The true artist is inexhaustibly receptive, but also inexhaustibly patient. He is well content that the feelings which his experiences generate should go through a period, perhaps a long period, of spiritual gestation. He takes for granted that they know their own ideal worth far better than he does, or rather that there is some one master feeling among them—the feeling after ideal beauty—which knows the respective values of all the rest, and which may therefore be trusted to sift and group them until it has given artistic form to such among them as really deserve artistic treatment. On one point he is clear. He will not reproduce his experiences, be their period of gestation short or long, until by some secret process (a process which belongs to the organic chemistry of the soul) they have begun to assume a beautiful form. Then the more conscious side of his spirit will act as their midwife and help to bring them to the birth. A vividly self-conscious nature, like Whitman's, is, as a rule, incapable of this masterly inactivity, this

far-seeing self-restraint. He must needs take the control of his feelings, and the consequent reproduction of his experiences, into his own hands, the result being that the Muse, the spirit of beauty, deserts him when he needs her most.

For example. There is nothing in Nature more beautiful (when it happens to be beautiful) than the human form, for in it the veil that hides the "soul of things" is thinnest and most luminous; but just because it is supremely beautiful, and because unity—the unity that spirit confers on all that it animates—is of its essence, the great masters have always been extremely reticent in their description of human beauty, and have always scrupulously abstained from enumerating its details. A profoundly artistic instinct has made them follow Lessing's wise advice. "Poets, paint for us the pleasure, the inclination, the love, the rapture, which beauty causes, and you have painted beauty itself!" They have felt that the best, the only way, to paint human beauty is to make the reader enter sympathetically into the feeling that beauty kindles,—love. But when Whitman wishes to communicate to us his poetic delight in the human *form*, he must needs give us a long list of the component parts, outward and inward, of the human *frame*. Here are some of them.

“Strong shoulders, manly beard, scapulas, hind-shoulders,  
and the ample side-round of the chest,  
Upper arm, armpit, elbow-socket, lower-arm, arm-  
sinews, arm-bones,  
Wrist and wrist-joints, hand, palm, knuckles, thumb,  
forefinger, finger-joints, finger-nails,  
Broad breast-front, curling hair of the breast, breast-  
bone, breast-side,” (&c. &c.)

This is not poetry, but elementary anatomy. An anatomist who knew his business could give us an equally artistic and much more exhaustive list. What would be thought of the painter who, instead of depicting the human body in the beauty of its spiritual unity, instead of making us forget all about its parts and think only of the living whole, inflicted upon us, in a series of sketches, the contents of a medical (or anatomical) museum?

There is no spontaneous overflow of emotion in these wearisome catalogues. They are deliberately drawn up in obedience to a quasi-philosophical theory. As Whitman sees the whole of Humanity in each individual man, so he sees the whole of Nature in each individual thing; and he seriously believes that in crowding his pages with lists of material things he is representing Reality in all its splendour and beauty. The form of his poetry has to adapt itself to this conception of Nature and of Art. I have elsewhere pointed out that if he is to give

utterance to all the feelings that reveal themselves in the fierce light of his extreme self-consciousness, if he is to pour them all out as he feels or seems to feel them, he must free himself from the trammels of rhyme and metre. There is another reason, as we can now see, why he should discard all conventional restrictions. If poetry is to be used for purposes which are frankly, and even grossly, prosaic, its outward form must be able and ready to sink, at a moment's notice, to the level of ordinary prose. Whitman's "*recitative*" admirably fulfils this requirement. At its best it is singularly impressive. There are certain inexpressible feelings—large, stormy, dreamy feelings that can never quite come to the birth—which it expresses (if I may be allowed the paradox) with marvellous power and effect. For this particular purpose it has no rival. Indeed, after reading some of Whitman's inspired passages, I feel for the moment as if all forms of metrical verse were by comparison cold, tame, and formal. But there is no other medium of expression in which the transition from poetry to prose is so rapidly or so easily made. Sometimes we find ourselves in the middle of plain, inoffensive prose without quite knowing how we got there. Sometimes there is a sudden descent from lofty heights to ignominious depths. Sometimes a

momentary plunge into the commonplace or the grotesque mars the movement of an otherwise beautiful passage. But through all its ups and downs the form of Whitman's poetry suits itself admirably to the matter or rather to the spirit. The want of harmony and rhythm is quite as much inward as outward. A chaotic philosophy—a philosophy which does its best to give back to the "void and formless Infinite" all that Time has won from it—is fitly mirrored in a formless outward form.\*

What developments would Whitman's philosophy undergo if its influence were to make itself widely felt? In other words, to what practical conclusions is it likely to lead us? I do not know what place Whitman holds in the estimation of his fellow-countrymen.† In

\* Whitman is well aware that the form of his poetry is formless. See "Spirit that form'd this scene" p. 89. of this volume.

† I am told that Whitman, like other prophets, has little or no honour in his own country. As he has offered his fellow-countrymen the sweet incense of sincere but extravagant flattery, one wonders at first why they have refused to accept him. But perhaps it is the very extravagance of his flattery that has hardened their hearts against him. He is never weary of telling them that their social and political condition is potentially, if not actually, perfect; and it may well be that some

this country his audience, though small, is select; but his admirers are for the most part men who either take a semi-dilettantist interest in the originality of his thought and the eccentricities of his style or are genuinely captivated by his passionate sympathy with his fellow men and with outward Nature. Popular he certainly is not, and is not likely to become. But the circle of his influence might conceivably widen as time went on; and it is therefore well to consider to what extent and in what directions his conceptions are calculated to affect the spiritual development of Humanity.

Whitman glorified and deified the average man. Did he ever ask himself what the average man would make of his poetry? He teaches the average man that he is as good as God, and therefore *a fortiori* as good as the best and greatest of his fellow men. He forbids him to look upward. He warns him against humility and all the feelings that are in any degree akin to it,—obedience, reverence, adoration, awe. Now every man instinctively loves himself, and

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deep-seated instinct of spiritual self-preservation, some secret resolve to keep open at all costs their communications with their ideal, has forbidden them to lay this too flattering unction to their souls, and has induced them to reject the poet (in spite of the genuineness of his poetry) who has ministered so prodigally to their self-esteem.

every man instinctively desires to be worthy of his own self-love ; but not every man desires to make himself worthy of his self-love. For the real object of self-love is the true or ideal self ; and it is only by a life of self-development and self-expansion that this higher self can be found. To lead such a life (with all the toil and self-sacrifice which it involves) makes a demand upon us which few are ready to meet ; and so the average man spends his days in trying to cheat himself into the belief that his average self is worthy of his self-love.\* So long as this process of self-deception is incomplete—so long as some secret uneasiness, some feeling of discontent with self, some power of self-criticism, remains—there is hope for the man ; but when the love which belongs to his ideal self has been wholly and finally transferred to the average self, the spiritual growth of the man has been arrested and his soul has begun to die. That being so, the worst service that can be rendered to any man is to persuade him that he is actually divine.

What kind of a self is it that Whitman invites us to deify ? Is it the average self, or is it something even lower than this ? The

\* Hence his undue regard for the judgment of his fellow men, whose good opinion he is all too ready to accept as a guarantee of his own intrinsic worth.



doctrine of universal equality abases Man exactly as much as it exalts him ; for if it raises him to the level of God, it also lowers him to the level of the animals. As the most animal of men is, presumably, on a level with the most spiritual, it is clear that animality as such is in no way inferior to humanity as such. Far from shrinking from this paradoxical conclusion, Whitman accepts it and even goes beyond it. The animals are to be preferred to men *in that they have no sense either of imperfection or of shame.*

“ They do not sweat and whine about their condition,  
They do not lie awake in the dark and weep for their  
sins,  
They do not make me sick discussing their duty to  
God.” \*

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\* It will be said that such passages as this embody a reaction from the extreme of self-abasement, and a protest against hypocrisy and cant. No doubt they do ; but the protest is overdone, and the reaction goes too far. When a poet becomes polemical, he exposes himself to serious criticism ; and when he flagrantly overstates his case and then adopts his overstatement as his gospel, it is but reasonable that his doctrines should be dealt with on their own merits and without regard to their antecedents. If it is a mistake to tell men that they are all “ miserable sinners,” it is not less of a mistake to tell them that they are all “ incredible Gods.” Would it not be nearer the truth to say, with Browning, that each of us is “ a God, though in the germ ” ?

They "never once skulk or find themselves indecent." Herodotus tells of certain barbarous tribes who "like the beasts" were entirely destitute of shame. (*μίξιν τούτων τῶν ἀνθρώπων εἶναι ἐμφανέα [λέγεται] κατάπερ τοῖσι προβάτοισι.*) The words "like the beasts" are, as he uses them, expressive of extreme degradation. In Whitman's mouth they would, I imagine, express sympathetic approval. The Massagetæ were certainly free from the "meanness" of "skulking and finding themselves indecent," and they seem to have been as "heroically nude" in their habits as Whitman himself was in his thought and speech. But whatever Whitman might have thought of the Massagetæ, it is clear that he admired the animals on account of their Massagetæan propensities; and the "average man," who can scarcely be expected to see the deeper meaning of his master's poetry, may well be pardoned if, after listening to his laudation of the animals and of all that is animal in human nature, he interprets his message to Mankind as a proclamation that the life of free, healthy animality is the true life of man. Whitman's substitution of impulse for duty—of the fitful gusts of Nature's breath for the steady pressure of her higher life—would naturally point to the same conclusion. So would his degradation of love—the soul-transfiguring passion of love—to

comradeship on the one hand and to animal desire on the other.

But the life of free, healthy animality would content the average man only so long as he remained a free, healthy animal. When those days were over he would begin to look about him for other sources of happiness. And though he had been taught that all men are equal and that he was as good as the best of men, he could not fail to see (the facts would be too strong for any theory to prevail against them) that in one respect at least men are hopelessly unequal, namely in the distribution of this world's goods. He could not fail to see that in democratic societies, which have abandoned other standards of worth, the power of wealth is greater than elsewhere ; and the very fact that his own mind had been freed from the taint of feudalism, with its prejudices in favour of birth, position, tradition, education, honour and other such "idols," would make him the more susceptible of the attractive influence of "great possessions," and the more ready to pay homage to financial and commercial success. The pursuit of wealth might engross his mind for a time ; but sooner or later, as the shadows lengthened, he would find himself meditating half-unconsciously on "great matters" which he had hitherto been content to ignore,—on the meaning of existence,

on the problem of reality, on the destiny of the soul. When that day came, what guidance would he get from his teacher? He would learn that "the body is the main concern, that it includes and is the soul," that material things are the real things of the spirit, that material occupations (hog-slaughtering and the like) are "realities" and "poems;" and though these doctrines might seem to justify both his early life of animality and his subsequent pursuit of wealth,\* they would infallibly lead him—the average man—to one dark conclusion, namely that death is the end of life. Nor would he be able to assimilate the consolation which Whitman's poetry, as distinguished from his philosophy, offers him so freely. He would see nothing in Whitman's exultant joy but the overflow of animal spirits; and animal spirits, as he knows from experience, are largely dependent on youth and health. As for Whitman's faith in death as the larger life, and in the soul as the subjective side of the Universe,—these mystical conceptions would not only be beyond his com-

\* For which (let me hasten to add) Whitman would have been the first to despise him. The material, objective side of the pursuit of wealth might well have been glorified by the author of "A Song for Occupations;" but the "mania of owning things" is one with which he had no sympathy.

prehension, but, so far as he could comprehend them, they would seem to him incompatible with the general tenour of his master's teaching. I doubt if Whitman will ever become a popular or even a semi-popular author; but if his influence were to diffuse itself widely, if the average man were to accept so much of his philosophy as the average man is able to understand, I think that a great wave of materialism, with all that materialism implies—sensuality, Mammon-worship, selfishness, hardness, vulgarity, cynicism, pessimism—would sweep over human life.

But Whitman's own life will never be submerged by that soul-destroying wave. No deluge can reach the sunlit heights of his soaring joy. For his joy (the joy of his inmost soul, not the impossible optimism which his political theories postulate) is joy in the fullest sense of that sacred word: it is compounded of hope and faith as well as of delight in the actual; and hope and faith will come to his rescue when delight, pure and simple, fails him. Sooner or later, delight, pure and simple, will fail him. Whitman, the apostle of universal equality, may flatter himself that all things are equally perfect and all men equally divine; but Whitman, the poet—the seer, the discernor of reality—knows

well enough that his other self is imagining a vain thing. For Whitman, like everyone else, is what he is, not what he professes to be, not even what he believes himself to be. Deep below the surface movement of his thought flows the real current of his poetic life,

“The central stream of what he feels indeed.”

He sees—he cannot fail to see—that there is wickedness and misery and injustice in human life ; and, now and again, breaking through his very raptures,

“There sobs I know not what ground-tone  
Of human agony.”

(It is because, in defiance of his theories, this thread of sadness is woven into its tissue, that the joy of his inmost soul is imperishable). Here is one significant passage—

“I sit and look out upon all the sorrows of the world,  
and upon all oppression and shame,  
I hear secret convulsive sobs from young men at anguish  
with themselves, remorseful after deeds done,  
I see in low life the mother misused by her children,  
dying, neglected, gaunt, desperate,  
I see the wife misused by her husband, I see the  
treacherous seducer of young women,  
I mark the ranklings of jealousy and unrequited love  
attempted to be hid, I see these sights on the earth,  
I see the workings of battle, pestilence, tyranny, I see  
martyrs and prisoners,

I observe a famine at sea, I observe the sailors casting  
lots who shall be kill'd to preserve the lives of  
the rest,  
I observe the slights and degradations cast by arrogant  
persons upon labourers, the poor, and upon  
negroes, and the like;  
All these—all the meanness and agony without end I  
sitting look out upon,  
See, hear, and am silent."

He is silent ; but he will speak at last. In  
another poem he passes in review a succession  
of human faces. Some of these are miserable  
and repulsive ; but he tells them that they cannot  
"trick" him, that he sees what is behind  
their "haggard and mean disguises."

"I saw the face of the most smear'd and slobbering  
idiot they had at the asylum,  
And I knew for my consolation what they knew not,  
I knew of the agents that emptied and broke my  
brother,  
The same wait to clear the rubbish from the fallen  
tenement,  
And I shall look again in a score or two of ages,  
And I shall meet the real landlord, perfect and un-  
harm'd, every inch as good as myself."

Yet he knows full well that these unhappy faces  
will never change for the better on this side of  
the grave. What then is the solution of this  
terrible problem ? If these evil faces are ever

to be redeemed, their redemption must be effected by the divine grace of *Death*.

Here we come to the "sovereign dogma" of Whitman's deeper philosophy, the cardinal faith on which the joy of his heart is hinged. Uncompromising realist that he is, he sees clearly enough that death is one of Nature's central facts,—a fact too which seems to give the lie to his optimism, to bar its further progress, to turn its triumphant advance into a disastrous retreat. If the joy of his heart is to lead him to final victory, he must recognise that death is the key to Nature's fortress, that as such it can neither be masked nor outflanked, and that if he is not to retire from it in confusion he must storm its terrible stronghold. And storm it he does with all the passionate energy of his vehement nature. He is not content to acquiesce in death, to speculate about it, to hope the best from it. He sees the futility of half-measures. He must "rush" the heights of death with the force and *élan* of unconquerable joy. He must find a deeper joy in death than in anything else in Nature. He must "glorify it above all;" he must "chant for it a chant of fullest welcome." These chants of welcome abound in his poems. He offers praise for "the fathomless universe, for life and joy, for love,"—but threefold praise



“For the sure-enwinding arms of cool-enfolding death.”

He joyously sings the dead,

“Lost in the loving floating ocean of thee,  
Laved in the flood of thy bliss, O Death.”

Death is the “purport of all life,” the “opener and usherer to the heavenly mansion.” “Life cannot exhibit all” to him: he must wait for the “exquisite transition,” for the “superb vistas” of death. Life does not provide for all, but “Heavenly Death provides for all.” “What,” he asks, “is finally beautiful except love and death?”


So sure, so steadfast, so triumphant is his faith in the “strong deliveress,” that whatever is symbolical of her has a peculiar fascination for him. His sympathy with outward Nature in all her moods and aspects is extraordinarily subtle, deep, and strong. But there is one thing in her life with which he seems to have a two-fold measure of sympathy,—a sympathy which gives him insight into its very soul, just as love gives us insight into the soul of a friend. That one thing is the *sea*. The sea, vast, ubiquitous, all-embracing, unfathomable, mysterious—the sea with its loneliness, its dumbness, its might, its majesty, its profound repose—is for him the very symbol (the very embodiment,

one might almost say) of death ; and his love of the sea is the very counterpart of his love of death.

What makes his attitude towards death the more significant is the fact that he had bent over more death beds than any man perhaps has ever done. While ministering to the sick and wounded soldiers of the Federal and Confederate armies, he saw many thousands of souls pass behind the veil of death ; and I needs must think that for his intensely sensitive and sympathetic nature the veil became strangely luminous, so that his love of death was in some sort the outcome of an actual experience, shadowy indeed and intangible, but transcendently real. It sometimes happens that the loss of a dear friend generates in one's breast an entirely new feeling which, while it lasts, cancels and even laughs to scorn one's instinctive fear of death ; and it is not unreasonable to suppose that in Whitman's case the loss of thousands of dear friends (for every wounded soldier was his beloved comrade) gave both permanence and intensity to this emancipative feeling, which for most of us (if experienced at all) is transient and all too easily effaced.

The philosophy that takes possession of Whitman's mind when his political prejudices are swamped by the spontaneous overflow of

his profounder emotions, is as true as it is deep. Of the weaving of philosophical systems there is no end, but in point of fact there are only three philosophies,—*optimism*, *pessimism*, and *indifference*. The optimist—the man who has made up his mind that light, not darkness, is at the heart of Nature—ought always to have the courage of his opinions, for if he is half-hearted he breaks the rules of his own game. Whatever theories, whatever beliefs, whatever *apparent* experiences are at war with his paramount conviction, he will, if he is wise, either repudiate or ignore. Whitman, whose whole nature is vehement and intense, is, as might be expected, the most thoroughgoing of optimists. He sees, as we all see, that misery and injustice disfigure, or seem to disfigure, the fair face of Nature. He feels, as we all feel, that death casts, or seems to cast, a dark and ever-deepening shadow on human life. These feelings are the stock-in-trade of every pessimist. Whitman cancels both of them at one stroke by his bold assumption that death, instead of being the crowning evil of existence,—that death itself is the healer of all wounds, the redresser of all injustices, the righter of all wrongs. Here is one of many passages in which he expresses this conviction:—



“I do not doubt that the passionately-wept deaths of

young men are provided for, and that the deaths of young women and the deaths of little children are provided for, . . .

I do not doubt that wrecks at sea, no matter what the horrors of them, no matter whose wife, child, husband, father, lover, has gone down, are provided for, to the minutest points, . . .

I do not think Life provides for all and for Time and Space, but I believe Heavenly Death provides for all."

This assumption is fraught with momentous consequences. The soul that is "included in the body" necessarily dies in the hour of death; and the soul that dies in the hour of death is (obviously) a mere function of the body,—in other words, as soul it is non-existent. But the soul that escapes into the larger world of death assimilates itself to its new environment and expands its being up to the illimitable limits of existence. The language that Whitman uses about the soul is certainly perplexing and self-contradictory; but whenever the deeper philosophy of his heart asserts itself, his psychology undergoes a singular change. Instead of identifying the soul with the body, he sends it abroad till it becomes conterminous with the Universe. The fact that he is ever trying to identify himself with all existent things, shows that the soul, as he conceives of it, far from being "included" in the body or anything else is well able to

“Centre both the worlds of Heaven and Hell.”

In one poem indeed—the beautiful and mystical  
“Passage to India”—he speaks of the soul as  
creative, in the fullest sense of the word.

O Thou transcendent,  
Nameless, the fibre and the breath,  
Light of the light, shedding forth universes, thou centre  
of them,

. . . . .

Thou pulse—thou motive of the stars, suns, systems,  
That, circling, move in order, safe, harmonious,  
Athwart the shapeless vastnesses of space,  
How should I think, how breathe a single breath, how  
speak, if, out of myself,  
I could not launch, to those, superior universes?

Swiftly I shrivel at the thought of God,  
At Nature and its wonders, Time and Space and Death,  
But that I, turning, call to thee, O soul, thou actual Me,  
And lo, thou gently masterest the orbs,  
Thou matest Time, smilest content at Death,  
And fillest, swellest full the Vastnesses of Space.

As Whitman's conception of the soul  
widens, his attitude towards the actual and the  
ideal undergoes a corresponding change. The  
infinite possibilities of death begin to disparage  
the actualities of life. The latter are still  
conceived of as wonderful and glorious; but  
Whitman feels that there are wonders beyond  
their wonder and glories beyond their glory;

and a quenchless thirst for the ideal begins to take possession of his soul. Not that he will ever look above himself, or sink into himself, in his quest of this unattainable goal. Reverence is and always will be entirely foreign to his temperament ; and the idea of finding himself by losing himself, of pruning his nature in order that it may bear fruit more abundantly, is one which he will never entertain. But with these limitations (for limitations they certainly are) he is one of the most audacious and adventurous of idealists. To be in love with death is to be in love with all the mystery and infinitude of Nature ; and such a love both stimulates a man's desires and hopes, and provides them with a boundless field for the play of their energies. Death, for Whitman, is the beginning of an endless voyage. While this life lasts we are in harbour preparing for our journey. When death comes we weigh anchor and set sail.

"Joy, shipmate, joy !  
(Pleas'd to my soul at death I cry,)  
Our life is closed, our life begins,  
The long, long anchorage we leave,  
The ship is clear at last, she leaps !  
She swiftly courses from the shore,  
Joy, shipmate, joy."

The sea is as mysterious as it is boundless, and

the course of the ship is uncertain ; but her goings are in safe hands, and the harbour that she makes for is ideal good.

“ They go ! They go ! I know that they go, but I know not where they go,  
But I know that they go toward the best—toward something great.”

The harbour will never be reached. The goal is unattainable. Whitman, the politician, may regard Democracy as the final solution of the political problem, and the America of to-day as the final end of existence ; but Whitman, the poet, knows that failure is the very soul of success.

“ This day before dawn I ascended a hill and look'd at the crowded heaven,  
And I said to my spirit *When we become the enfolders of those orbs, and the pleasure and knowledge of everything in them, shall we be fill'd and satisfied then ?*  
And my spirit said, *No, we but level that lift to pass and continue beyond.*”

“ Have the past struggles succeeded ?  
What has succeeded ? yourself ? your nation ? Nature ?  
Now understand me well—it is provided in the essence of things that from any fruition of success, no matter what, shall come forth something to make a greater struggle necessary.”

When we read such words as these, we begin to think that the poet has emancipated himself

from the false control of the politician. But no : the emancipation will never be complete. Whitman's political theories are the outcome of earnest conviction, and they will control and direct the very efforts that his deeper nature makes to free itself from their influence. Just as he tries to find his soul by making it fill all the spaces and all the ages, rather than by making it forget its lower self and burn upward towards its own ideal purity, so his movement towards "the best" is always outward and onward, never inward and upward. His false assumption that all the strata of existence are equally divine and glorious discountenances, as a theory, the very idealism which, as an emotion, as a sentiment of unconquerable joy, it is ever tending to generate ; for if the actual is really perfect, why should we ever weigh anchor and quit its harbour ? Lover of death that Whitman is, he ought to know that death is the chief instrument of Nature's progressive regeneration ; that the "soul of things" is re-incarnated again and again ; that life is ever preparing the way for death, and death for birth into a purer ether and a wider world. The truth is (but it is a truth which Whitman will never consciously learn) that reverence and humility, far from being repugnant to Nature, are the very breath of her higher life ; that it is because she is



always discontented with herself, and alway looking upward, that she is able to work out her salvation by rising continuously

“ On stepping stones  
Of her dead selves to higher things.”

Whitman tries hard to persuade himself that there are no distinctions in Nature, that all things are equally perfect and absolutely divine; but his heart is wiser than his mind, and the optimism which found its earlier expression in the fatal conception of universal equality, saves itself from premature extinction by changing, in defiance of his theories, into the desire for and pursuit of ideal good. And this desire and this pursuit mean, if they have any meaning, that there *are* distinctions in Nature; that contrast, not to say conflict, is the law of her being; that, far from being everywhere and at all times perfect, she is everywhere and at all times passing through phases of change and stages of development which are incompatible with perfection, lifting herself above herself, disowning her own earlier efforts, forgetting the things that are behind, transforming herself in fine through every fibre of her existence from chaos to order, from discord to harmony, from the lower and narrower to the higher and wider life.

While we protest against Whitman's fatal deification of the actual, let us be thankful that the joy of his heart which caused that premature outburst of exultation was strong enough to break loose from the theories in which he strove to imprison it and to lead him, unknown to himself, to the conception of infinite progress towards an unattainable goal. Ideal perfection, ideal beauty, ideal good,—it matters little by which name we call that goal so long as we realise that it is in its very essence unattainable; that every achievement, so far as it is an achievement, has missed its mark; that the path of progress is the path of continuous failure; but that failure, if only (in all *humility*) we will accept it as such, is the prelude to triumphant success. Let us be thankful that Whitman has inflamed our hearts (as in his inspired moods he has surely done) with something of his own deep-seated desire for the ideal, that he has awakened in us a restless longing "to escape from our anchorage and drive free." For this service—the greatest that man can render to man—we may well forget the shortcomings of the creed that he professed; and when he calls to us to heave anchor and start on our great voyage, we may well answer him with his own cry of hope and triumph, "Joy, shipmate, joy." The very shortcomings of his

formal creed—the lawlessness and irreverence that threaten at last to unweave the whole tissue of human progress,—by freeing us from the despotism of custom and convention, may have helped to beget in us that large discontent, that “restlessness after we know not what,” which predisposes the soul to daring adventures. In any case the spirit, the inner meaning, of his creed is sublimely grand and true. For the essence of his esoteric teaching is, that the unattainable, the inexpressible—“that which eludes this verse and every verse”—is the “real of the real.”

“Haply God’s riddle it, so vague and yet so certain,  
The soul for it, and all the visible universe for it,  
And heaven at last for it.”

Were I to try to sum up in a few words the impression that Whitman’s poetry has made upon me, I should say that, consciously and theoretically, he is the poet of democratic equality,—and therefore of chaos; that unconsciously, and in spite of himself, he is the poet of the ideal, of the

“one far-off divine event  
To which the whole Creation moves;”

and that along the whole range of his nature he is the poet of joy,—and therefore of death.

His personality is intensely aggressive ; and his influence on those whom he attracts is proportionately strong. Indeed, if once one were drawn entirely within the circle of his attraction, there would, I think, be no escape from it. That being so, it is well that one should sometimes feel the counter-attraction of some diametrically opposite influence, and so be kept from quitting the orbit of one's own personal life. Such a counter-attraction I have found in the influence of a book, which is as intense, as single-hearted, and as one-sided as Whitman's poetry, and yet has so little in common with it that it seems to belong to an entirely different world,—the *Imitation of Christ*.

I have pointed out that a harmonious soul is one which grows both upward and outward, and I have contended that in Whitman's poetry the growth is entirely outward, that he has as it were lost his aspiring "leader," and that, so far as he liberates us from our ordinary selves, he does so by carrying us outside ourselves into the life of outward Nature, and into the social life of Mankind. In the *Imitation of Christ* the growth of the soul is entirely upward. The ascent of the tree is everything. Not a single branch is put forth but the few that cluster round the "leader" as it struggles upward towards the sky. Of sympathy with outward Nature ; of

the expansion of the soul in the direction of art and poetry, of knowledge and action ; of interest in political, in social, in domestic life, or even of recognition of their lawful claims, there is not a trace. The individualism, the "austere inwardness," of the book is complete. The soul has but one thought,—to struggle inward and upward, in sublime solitude, towards spiritual perfection. Far from developing the tendencies that make for its outward growth, it sternly represses them. Self-denial—the cutting back of every natural instinct, the stifling of every desire that might conceivably distract the soul from its central purpose—is the only way that it will deign to follow to its goal. Humility, or the consciousness of imperfection, is the very breath of its being ; humility, with all that it implies,—reverence, adoration, awe. Submission to discipline, to constraint, to self-imposed suffering ; patience under affliction ; meek acceptance of insult, injury, and degradation ;—are its appointed means of grace. With love (in the human sense of the word), with sympathy, with comradeship, with natural affection, it has no concern. Aspiration—hunger and thirst after righteousness—is the beginning and end of its desire. Love of the ideal, as embodied in Christ, is its only flame.

Such a conception of life is as far removed

from Whitman's as it can possibly be. The whole "diameter of being" separates the *Imitation* from the *Song of Myself*. It is true that, just because they are antipodal to one another, the two minds have some striking points of resemblance. Thus both are passionately in earnest. Both have a strong sense of reality. Both have a deep contempt for "the world." Both are impatient of conventionality, of fashion, of opinion. These, however, are features on which we need not dwell. What it does concern us to notice is, that the two conceptions are vehemently and fundamentally antagonistic to one another, and that both are far removed (perhaps equally far removed) from the true centre of gravity of human life.

If the tree that has ceased to ascend, and can only grow outward, is, in spite of the immense development of its branches, maimed and misshapen, the same must be said of the tree that has no branches and can do nothing but ascend. In each case the growth is one-sided, inharmonious. The balance has been lost.

Are we to say that the path of health and safety is in a mean between these extremes; that their respective influences should be allowed to cancel one another; that our attitude towards them should be one of colourless neutrality? No;

there is room in our life for both conceptions; and the soul may safely submit itself to the influence of either, so long as it does not allow itself to be deadened to the influence of the other. What is needed is a larger and profounder philosophy which shall reconcile these "fell, incensèd opposites" by absorbing them into itself, which shall harmonise sympathy with aspiration, manliness with humility, freedom with duty, delight in the actual with love of the ideal, naturalism with spiritualism, outward with upward growth. Some day or other this higher creed will disclose itself to human thought. Meanwhile, as the soul, as the whole inner life of man, moves forward in quest of ideal truth, it will advance in safety so long as its right flank is guarded by the aspiring inwardness of mediæval monasticism, its left by the exultant naturalism of modern democracy. For the present these extreme conceptions, so antagonistic and yet so essential to one another, will co-operate at equal distances from the Headquarters of our inner life; but as the enveloping movement of the soul (round the stronghold of the Ideal) begins to declare itself, they will tend to unite and become one.

When that happier day comes, the Poet will be the first to welcome and proclaim it. Indeed there is no day in the ideal future to

which his prophetic insight looks forward so eagerly or so hopefully. The very mission of Poetry, as Whitman himself has told us in felicitous words, is to make peace between "outwardness" and "inwardness," between "Nature" and the "soul :"—

"When the full-grown poet came,  
Out spake pleased Nature (the round impassive globe,  
with all its shows of day and night) saying, *He is mine ;*  
But out spake too the Soul of man, proud, jealous, and  
unreconciled, *Nay, he is mine alone ;*  
Then the full-grown poet stood between the two, and  
took each by the hand ;  
And to-day and ever so stands, as blender, uniter, tightly  
holding hands,  
Which he will never release until he reconciles the two,  
And wholly and joyously blends them."



Selections from *Leaves of Grass*



## PREFACE TO SELECTIONS

*I*N compiling this brief anthology, my object has been to induce persons who may have been repelled by Whitman's earlier and more "characteristic" writings, to reconsider their adverse verdict and renew their study of his poetry. The passages that I have strung together have been selected for their poetic merits only. I do not pretend that they are "characteristic" in the sense which those who regard "Leaves of Grass" as a literary and psychological curiosity might attach to that word. But are they the less representative of Whitman's genius because they happen to possess poetic charm? One's answer to this question will depend on the estimate that one forms of Whitman. It is impossible to study his writings without realising that he has a dual personality. Which self is

*the true Whitman? Is it the inspired poet,—the singer of life, of love, of death, of joy, of cosmic sympathy, of the unattainable ideal? Or is it the fervent democrat; the defiant advocate of "equality," of "animality," of "heroic nudity;" the deifier of the average and the actual; the painter of the crude, the gross, the sordid, the grotesque? This is a problem which each student of Whitman must solve for himself. To me it seems more than probable that the poet, pure and simple, will be remembered and honoured when the socio-political prophet has been forgotten or, if remembered, has fallen into disesteem. And I cannot but think that the most truly characteristic of his writings are those in which insight and imagination have triumphed over prejudice and theory, with the result that beautiful thoughts and profound feelings have overflowed into other hearts through the channel of impassioned speech.*

## IN CABIN'D SHIPS AT SEA.

In cabin'd ships at sea,  
The boundless blue on every side expanding,  
With whistling winds and music of the waves, the large  
    imperious waves,  
Or some lone bark buoy'd on the dense marine,  
Where joyous full of faith, spreading white sails,  
She cleaves the ether mid the sparkle and the foam of  
    day, or under many a star at night,  
By sailors young and old haply will I, a reminiscence of  
    the land, be read,  
In full rapport at last.

*Here are our thoughts, voyagers' thoughts,  
Here not the land, firm land, alone appears, may then by  
    them be said,  
The sky o'erarches here, we feel the undulating deck beneath our  
    feet,  
We feel the long pulsation, ebb and flow of endless motion,  
The tones of unseen mystery, the vague and vast suggestions of  
    the briny world, the liquid-flowing syllables,  
The perfume, the faint creaking of the cordage, the melancholy  
    rhythm,  
The boundless vista and the horizon far and dim are all here,  
And this is ocean's poem.*

Then falter not O book, fulfil your destiny,  
You not a reminiscence of the land alone,  
You too as a lone bark cleaving the ether, purpos'd I  
    know not whither, yet ever full of faith,  
Consort to every ship that sails, sail you !  
Bear forth to them folded my love, (dear mariners, for  
    you I fold it here in every leaf ;)  
Speed on my book ! spread your white sails my little  
    bark athwart the imperious waves,  
Chant on, sail on, bear o'er the boundless blue from me  
    to every sea,  
This song for mariners and all their ships.

#### FROM THE "SONG OF MYSELF."

I am he that walks with the tender and growing night,  
I call to the earth and sea half-held by the night.  
Press close bare-bosom'd night—press close magnetic  
    nourishing night !  
Night of south winds—night of the large few stars !  
Still nodding night—mad naked summer night.

Smile O voluptuous cool-breath'd earth !  
Earth of the slumbering and liquid trees !  
Earth of departed sunset—earth of the mountains misty-  
    topt !  
Earth of the vitreous pour of the full moon just tinged  
    with blue !  
Earth of shine and dark mottling the tide of the river !  
Earth of the limpid gray of clouds brighter and clearer  
    for my sake !  
Far-swooping elbow'd earth—rich apple-blossom'd earth !  
Smile, for your lover comes.

Prodigal, you have given me love—therefore I to you  
give love !  
O unspeakable passionate love.

## OF THE TERRIBLE DOUBT OF APPEARANCES.

OF the terrible doubt of appearances,  
Of the uncertainty after all, that we may be deluded,  
That may-be reliance and hope are but speculations  
after all,  
That may-be identity beyond the grave is a beautiful  
fable only,  
May-be the things I perceive, the animals, plants, men,  
hills, shining and flowing waters,  
The skies of day and night, colors, densities, forms,  
may-be these are (as doubtless they are) only  
apparitions, and the real something has yet to be  
known,  
(How often they dart out of themselves as if to confound  
me and mock me !  
How often I think neither I know, nor any man knows,  
aught of them,)  
May-be seeming to me what they are (as doubtless they  
indeed but seem) as from my present point of view,  
and might prove (as of course they would) nought  
of what they appear, or nought anyhow, from  
entirely changed points of view ;  
To me these and the like of these are curiously answer'd  
by my lovers, my dear friends,  
When he whom I love travels with me or sits a long  
while holding me by the hand,  
When the subtle air, the impalpable, the sense that  
words and reason hold not, surround us and  
pervade us,

Then I am charged with untold and untellable wisdom,  
I am silent, I require nothing further,  
I cannot answer the question of appearances or that of  
identity beyond the grave,  
But I walk or sit indifferent, I am satisfied,  
He ahold of my hand has completely satisfied me.

#### NOT HEAT FLAMES UP AND CONSUMES.

Not heat flames up and consumes,  
Not sea-waves hurry in and out,  
Not the air delicious and dry, the air of ripe summer,  
bears lightly along white down-balls of myriads of  
seeds,  
Wafted, sailing gracefully, to drop where they may ;  
Not these, O none of these more than the flames of me,  
consuming, burning for his love whom I love,  
O none more than I hurrying in and out ;  
Does the tide hurry, seeking something, and never give  
up? O I the same,  
O nor down-balls nor perfumes, nor the high rain-emitting  
clouds, are borne through the open air,  
Any more than my soul is borne through the open air,  
Wafted in all directions, O love, for friendship, for you.

#### SOON SHALL THE WINTER'S FOIL BE HERE.

Soon shall the winter's foil be here ;  
Soon shall these icy ligatures unbind and melt—A little  
while,  
And air, soil, wave, suffused, shall be in softness, bloom  
and growth—a thousand forms shall rise



From these dead clods and chills as from low burial  
    graves.  
Thine eyes, ears—all thy best attributes—all that takes  
    cognizance of natural beauty,  
Shall wake and fill. Thou shalt perceive the simple  
    shows, the delicate miracles of earth,  
Dandelions, clover, the emerald grass, the early scents  
    and flowers,  
The arbutus under foot, the willow's yellow-green, the  
    blossoming plum and cherry ;  
With these the robin, lark and thrush, singing their  
    songs—the flitting bluebird ;  
For such the scenes the annual play brings on.

### WARBLE FOR LILAC-TIME.

WARBLE me now for joy of lilac-time, (returning in  
    reminiscence,)  
Sort me O tongue and lips for Nature's sake, souvenirs  
    of earliest summer,  
Gather the welcome signs, (as children with pebbles or  
    stringing shells,)  
Put in April and May, the hylas croaking in the ponds,  
    the elastic air,  
Bees, butterflies, the sparrow with its simple notes,  
Blue-bird and darting swallow, nor forget the high-hole  
    flashing his golden wings,  
The tranquil sunny haze, the clinging smoke, the vapor,  
Shimmer of waters with fish in them, the cerulean above,  
All that is jocund and sparkling, the brooks running,  
The maple woods, the crisp February days and the  
    sugar-making,  
The robin where he hops, bright-eyed, brown-breasted,  
With musical clear call at sunrise, and again at sunset,

Or flitting among the trees of the apple-orchard, building  
the nest of his mate,  
The melted snow of March, the willow sending forth its  
yellow-green sprouts,  
For spring-time is here! the summer is here! and what  
is this in it and from it?  
Thou, soul, unloosen'd—the restlessness after I know  
not what;  
Come, let us lag here no longer, let us be up and away!  
O if one could but fly like a bird!  
O to escape, to sail forth as in a ship!  
To glide with thee O soul, o'er all, in all, as a ship o'er  
the waters;  
Gathering these hints, the preludes, the blue sky, the  
grass, the morning drops of dew,  
The lilac-scent, the bushes with dark green heart-shaped  
leaves,  
Wood-violets, the little delicate pale blossoms called  
innocence,  
Samples and sorts not for themselves alone, but for their  
atmosphere,  
To grace the bush I love—to sing with the birds,  
A warble for joy of lilac-time, returning in reminiscence.

### O MAGNET-SOUTH.

O MAGNET-SOUTH! O glistening perfumed South! my  
South!  
O quick mettle, rich blood, impulse and love! good and  
evil! O all dear to me!  
O dear to me my birth-things—all moving things and  
the trees where I was born—the grains, plants,  
rivers,

Dear to me my own slow sluggish rivers where they  
 flow, distant, over flats of silvery sands or through  
 swamps,  
 Dear to me the Roanoke, the Savannah, the Altamahaw,  
 the Pedee, the Tombigbee, the Santee, the Coosa  
 and the Sabine,  
 O pensive, far away wandering, I return with my soul  
 to haunt their banks again,  
 Again in Florida I float on transparent lakes, I float  
 on the Okeechobee, I cross the hummock-land or  
 through pleasant openings or dense forests,  
 I see the parrots in the woods, I see the papaw-tree and  
 the blossoming titi ;  
 Again, sailing in my coaster on deck, I coast off Georgia,  
 I coast up the Carolinas,  
 I see where the live-oak is growing, I see where the  
 yellow-pine, the scented bay-tree, the lemon and  
 orange, the cypress, the graceful palmetto,  
 I pass rude sea-headlands and enter Pamlico sound  
 through an inlet, and dart my vision inland ;  
 O the cotton plant! the growing fields of rice, sugar,  
 hemp !  
 The cactus guarded with thorns, the laurel-tree with  
 large white flowers,  
 The range afar, the richness and barrenness, the old  
 woods charged with mistletoe and trailing moss,  
 The piney odor and the gloom, the awful natural stillness,  
 (here in these dense swamps the freebooter carries  
 his gun, and the fugitive has his conceal'd hut ;)  
 O the strange fascination of these half-known half-  
 impassable swamps, infested by reptiles, resounding  
 with the bellow of the alligator, the sad noises of  
 the night-owl and the wild-cat, and the whirr of the  
 rattlesnake,  
 The mocking-bird, the American mimic, singing all the  
 forenoon, singing through the moon-lit night,

The humming-bird, the wild turkey, the raccoon, the  
opossum ;  
A Kentucky corn-field, the tall, graceful, long-leav'd  
corn, slender, flapping, bright green, with tassels,  
with beautiful ears each well-sheath'd in its husk ;  
O my heart! O tender and fierce pangs, I can stand  
them not, I will depart ;  
O to be a Virginian where I grew up! O to be a  
Carolinian !  
O longings irrepressible! O I will go back to old  
Tennessee and never wander more.

### TO A LOCOMOTIVE IN WINTER.

**THEE** for my recitative,  
Thee in the driving storm even as now, the snow, the  
winter-day declining,  
Thee in thy panoply, thy measur'd dual throbbing and  
thy beat convulsive,  
Thy black cylindric body, golden brass and silvery steel,  
Thy ponderous side-bars, parallel and connecting rods,  
gyrating, shuttling at thy sides,  
Thy metrical, now swelling pant and roar, now tapering  
in the distance,  
Thy great protruding head-light fix'd in front,  
Thy long, pale, floating vapor-pennants, tinged with  
delicate purple,  
The dense and murky clouds out-belching from thy  
smoke-stack,  
Thy knitted frame, thy springs and valves, the tremulous  
twinkle of thy wheels,  
Thy train of cars behind, obedient, merrily following,  
Through gale or calm, now swift, now slack, yet steadily  
careering ;

Type of the modern—emblem of motion and power—  
pulse of the continent,  
For once come serve the Muse and merge in verse, even  
as here I see thee,  
With storm and buffeting gusts of wind and falling snow,  
By day thy warning ringing bell to sound its notes,  
By night thy silent signal lamps to swing.

Fierce-throated beauty !  
Roll through my chant with all thy lawless music, thy  
swinging lamps at night,  
Thy madly-whistled laughter, echoing, rumbling like an  
earthquake, rousing all,  
Law of thyself complete, thine own track firmly holding,  
(No sweetness debonair of tearful harp or glib piano  
thine,)  
Thy trills of shrieks by rocks and hills return'd,  
Launch'd o'er the prairies wide, across the lakes,  
To the free skies unpent and glad and strong.

### SPIRIT THAT FORM'D THIS SCENE.

*Written in Platte Canon, Colorado.*

SPIRIT that form'd this scene,  
These tumbled rock-piles grim and red.  
These reckless heaven-ambitious peaks,  
These gorges, turbulent-clear streams, this naked fresh-  
ness,  
These formless wild arrays, for reasons of their own,  
I know thee, savage spirit—we have communed together,  
Mine too such wild arrays, for reasons of their own ;  
Was't charged against my chants they had forgotten  
art ?

To fuse within themselves its rules precise and  
delicatesse?  
The lyrist's measur'd beat, the wrought-out temple's  
grace—column and polish'd arch forgot?  
But thou that revelest here—spirit that formed this  
scene,  
They have remember'd thee.

### CAVALRY CROSSING A FORD.

A LINE in long array where they wind betwixt green  
islands,  
They take a serpentine course, their arms flash in the  
sun—hark to the musical clank,  
Behold the silvery river, in it the splashing horses  
loitering stop to drink,  
Behold the brown-faced men, each group, each person a  
picture, the negligent rest on the saddles,  
Some emerge on the opposite bank, others are just  
entering the ford—while,  
Scarlet and blue and snowy white,  
The guidon flags flutter gaily in the wind.

### BIVOUAC ON A MOUNTAIN SIDE.

I SEE before me now a traveling army halting,  
Below a fertile valley spread, with barns and the orchards  
of summer,  
Behind, the terraced sides of a mountain; abrupt, in  
places rising high,  
Broken, with rocks, with clinging cedars, with tall  
shapes dingily seen,  
The numerous camp-fires scattered near and far, some  
away up on the mountain,

The shadowy forms of men and horses, looming, large-sized, flickering.

And over all the sky—the sky! far, far out of reach,  
studded, breaking out, the eternal stars.

### BY THE BIVOUAC'S FITFUL FLAME.

By the bivouac's fitful flame,  
A procession winding around me, solemn and sweet and  
slow—but first I note  
The tents of the sleeping army, the fields' and woods'  
dim outline,  
The darkness lit by spots of kindled fire, the silence,  
Like a phantom far or near an occasional figure moving,  
The shrubs and trees, (as I lift my eyes they seem to be  
stealthily watching me,)  
While wind in procession thoughts, O tender and  
wondrous thoughts,  
Of life and death, of home and the past and loved,  
and of those that are far away;  
A solemn and slow procession there as I sit on the  
ground,  
By the bivouac's fitful flame.

### LO, VICTRESS ON THE PEAKS.

Lo, Victress on the peaks,  
Where thou with mighty brow regarding the world,  
(The world O Libertad, that vainly conspired against  
thee,)  
Out of its countless beleaguering toils, after thwarting  
them all  
Dominant, with the dazzling sun around thee,

Flauntest now unharm'd in immortal soundness and  
bloom—lo, in these hours supreme,  
No poem proud, I chanting bring to thee, nor mastery's  
rapturous verse,  
But a cluster containing night's darkness and blood-  
dripping wounds,  
And psalms of the dead.

### RECONCILIATION.

WORD over all, beautiful as the sky,  
Beautiful that war and all its deeds of carnage must in  
time be utterly lost,  
That the hands of the sisters Death and Night in-  
cessantly softly wash again, and ever again, this  
soil'd world ;  
For my enemy is dead, a man divine as myself is dead,  
I look where he lies white-faced and still in the coffin—  
I draw near,  
Bend down and touch lightly with my lips the white  
face in the coffin.

### WHEN LILACS LAST IN THE DOORYARD BLOOM'D.

#### I

WHEN lilacs last in the dooryard bloom'd,  
And the great star early droop'd in the western sky in  
the night,  
I mourn'd, and yet shall mourn with ever-returning  
spring.  
  
Ever-returning spring, trinity sure to me you bring,  
Lilac blooming perennial and drooping star in the west,  
And thought of him I love.



## 2

O powerful western fallen star !  
 O shades of night—O moody, tearful night !  
 O great star disappear'd—O the black murk that hides  
     the star !  
 O cruel hands that hold me powerless—O helpless soul  
     of me !  
 O harsh surrounding cloud that will not free my soul.

## 3

In the dooryard fronting an old farmhouse near the  
 white-washed palings,  
 Stands the lilac-bush tall-growing, with heart-shaped  
     leaves of rich green,  
 With many a pointed blossom rising delicate, with the  
     perfume strong I love,  
 With every leaf a miracle—and from this bush in the  
     dooryard,  
 With delicate-color'd blossoms and heart-shaped leaves  
     of rich green,  
 A sprig with its flower I break.

## 4

In the swamp in secluded recesses,  
 A shy and hidden bird is warbling a song.

Solitary the thrush,  
 The hermit withdrawn to himself, avoiding the settle-  
     ments,  
 Sings by himself a song.

Song of the bleeding throat,  
 Death's outlet song of life (for well dear brother I know,  
 If thou wast not granted to sing thou would'st surely die.)

## 5

Over the breast of the spring, the land, amid cities,  
 Amid lanes and through old woods, where lately the violets  
   peep'd from the ground, spotting the gray debris,  
 Amid the grass in the fields each side of the lanes, passing  
   the endless grass,  
 Passing the yellow-spear'd wheat, every grain from its  
   shroud in the dark-brown fields uprisen,  
 Passing the apple-tree blows of white and pink in the  
   orchards,  
 Carrying a corpse to where it shall rest in the grave,  
 Night and day journeys a coffin.

## 6

Coffin that passes through lanes and streets,  
 Through day and night with the great cloud darkening  
   the land,  
 With the pomp of the inloop'd flags with the cities  
   draped in black,  
 With the show of the States themselves as of crape-  
   veil'd women standing,  
 With processions long and winding and the flambeaus  
   of the night,  
 With the countless torches lit, with the silent sea of  
   faces and the unbared heads,  
 With the waiting depot, the arriving coffin, and the  
   sombre faces,  
 With dirges through the night, with the thousand voices  
   rising strong and solemn,  
 With all the mournful voices of the dirges pour'd around  
   the coffin,  
 The dim-lit churches and the shuddering organs—where  
   amid these you journey,  
 With the tolling tolling bells' perpetual clang,  
 Here, coffin that slowly passes,  
 I give you my sprig of lilac.

(Nor for you, for one alone,  
 Blossoms and branches green to coffins all I bring.  
 For fresh as the morning, thus would I chant a song for  
 you, O sane and sacred death.

All over bouquets of roses,  
 O death, I cover you over with roses and early lilies,  
 But mostly and now the lilac that blooms the first,  
 Copious I break, I break the sprigs from the bushes,  
 With loaded arms I come, pouring for you,  
 For you and the coffins all of you, O death.)

O western orb sailing the heaven,  
 Now I know what you must have meant as a month  
     since I walk'd,  
 As I walk'd in silence the transparent shadowy night,  
 As I saw you had something to tell as you bent to me  
     night after night,  
 As you droop'd from the sky low down as if to my side,  
     (while the other stars all look'd on,)  
 As we wander'd together the solemn night, (for something  
     I know not what kept me from sleep,)  
 As the night advanced, and I saw on the rim of the west  
     how full you were of woe,  
 As I stood on the rising ground in the breeze in the cool  
     transparent night,  
 As I watch'd where you pass'd and was lost in the  
     netherward black of the night,  
 As my soul in its trouble dissatisfied sank, as where you  
     sad orb,  
 Concluded, dropt in the night, and was gone.

Sing on there in the swamp,  
 O singer bashful and tender, I hear your notes, I hear  
     your call,  
 I hear, I come presently, I understand you,  
 But a moment I linger, for the lustrous star has detain'd  
     me,  
 The star my departing comrade holds and detains me.

## 10

O how shall I warble myself for the dead one there I  
     loved?  
 And how shall I deck my song for the large sweet soul  
     that has gone?  
 And what shall my perfume be for the grave of him I  
     love?

Sea-winds blown from east and west,  
 Blown from the Eastern sea and blown from the Western  
     sea, till there on the prairies meeting,  
 These and with these and the breath of my chant,  
 I'll perfume the grave of him I love.

## 11

O what shall I hang on the chamber walls?  
 And what shall the pictures be that I hang on the walls,  
 To adorn the burial-house of him I love?

Pictures of growing spring and farms and homes,  
 With the Fourth-month eve at sundown, and the gray  
     smoke lucid and bright,  
 With floods of the yellow gold of the gorgeous, indolent,  
     sinking sun, burning, expanding the air,

With the fresh sweet herbage under foot, and the pale  
green leaves of the trees prolific,  
In the distance the flowing glaze, the breast of the river,  
with a wind-dapple here and there,  
With ranging hills on the banks, with many a line  
against the sky, and shadows,  
And the city at hand with dwellings so dense, and stacks  
of chimneys,  
And all the scenes of life, and the workshops, and the  
workmen homeward returning.

12

Lo, body and soul—this land,  
My own Manhattan with spires, and the sparkling and  
hurrying tides, and the ships,  
The varied and ample land, the South and the North in  
the light, Ohio's shores and flashing Missouri,  
And ever the far-spreading prairies cover'd with grass  
and corn.

Lo, the most excellent sun so calm and haughty,  
The violet and purple morn with just-felt breezes,  
The gentle soft-born measureless light,  
The miracle-spreading bathing all, the fulfill'd noon,  
The coming eve delicious, the welcome night and the  
stars,  
Over my cities shining all, enveloping man and land.

13

Sing on, sing on, you gray-brown bird,  
Sing from the swamps, the recesses, pour your chant  
from the bushes,  
Limitless out of the dusk, out of the cedars and pines.

Sing on dearest brother, warble your reedy song,  
Loud human song, with voice of uttermost woe.

O liquid and free and tender !  
O wild and loose to my soul—O wondrous singer !  
You only I hear—yet the star holds me, (but will soon  
depart.)  
Yet the lilac with mastering odor holds me.

14

Now while I sat in the day and look'd forth,  
In the close of the day with its light and the fields of  
spring, and the farmers preparing their crops,  
In the large unconscious scenery of my land with its  
lakes and forests,  
In the heavenly aerial beauty, (after the perturb'd winds  
and the storms,)  
Under the arching heavens of the afternoon swift passing,  
and the voices of children and women,  
The many-moving sea-tides, and I saw the ships, how  
they sail'd,  
And the summer approaching with richness, and the  
fields all busy with labor,  
And the infinite separate houses, how they all went on,  
each with its meals and minutia of daily usages,  
And the streets how their throbblings throb'd, and the  
cities pent—lo, then and there,  
Falling upon them all and among them all, enveloping  
me with the rest,  
Appear'd the cloud, appear'd the long black trail,  
And I knew death, its thought, and the sacred know-  
ledge of death.

Then with the knowledge of death as walking one side  
of me,  
And the thought of death close-walking the other side  
of me,

And I in the middle as with companions, and as holding  
the hands of companions,  
I fled forth to the hiding receiving night that talks not,  
Down to the shores of the water, the path by the swamp  
in the dimness,  
To the solemn shadowy cedars and ghostly pines so still.

And the singer so shy to the rest receiv'd me,  
The gray-brown bird I know receiv'd us comrades three,  
And he sang the carol of death, and a verse for him I  
love.

From deep secluded recesses,  
From the fragrant cedars and the ghostly pines so still,  
Came the carol of the bird.

And the charm of the carol rapt me,  
As I held as if by their hands my comrades in the night.  
And the voice of my spirit tallied the song of the bird.

*Come lovely and soothing death,  
Undulate round the world, serenely arriving, arriving,  
In the day, in the night, to all, to each,  
Sooner or later delicate death.*

*Prais'd be the fathomless universe,  
For life and joy, and for objects and knowledge curious,  
And for love, sweet love—but praise ! praise ! praise !  
For the sure entwining arms of cool-enfolding death.*

*Dark mother always gliding near with soft feet,  
Have none chanted for thee a chant of fullest welcome ?  
Then I chant it for thee, I glorify thee above all,  
I bring thee a song that when thou must indeed come, come  
unfalteringly.*

*Approach strong deliveress,  
When it is so, when thou hast taken them I joyously sing the  
dead,  
Lost in the loving floating ocean of thee,  
Laved in the flood of thy bliss, O death.*

*From me to thee glad serenades,  
Dances for thee I propose saluting thee, adornments and feastings  
for thee,  
And the sights of the open landscape and the high-spread sky  
are fitting,  
And life and the fields, and the huge and thoughtful night.*

*The night in silence under many a star,  
The ocean shore and the husky whispering wave whose voice  
I know,  
And the soul turning to thee, O vast and well-veil'd death,  
And the body gratefully nestling close to thee.*

*Over the tree-tops I float thee a song,  
Over the rising and sinking waves, over the myriad fields and  
the prairies wide,  
Over the dense-pack'd cities all and the teeming wharves and  
ways,  
I float this carol with joy, with joy to thee, O death.*

15

*To the tally of my soul,  
Loud and strong kept up the gray-brown bird,  
With pure deliberate notes spreading filling the night.*

*Loud in the pines and cedars dim,  
Clear in the freshness moist and the swamp-perfume,  
And I with my comrades there in the night.  
While my sight that was bound in my eyes unclosed,  
As to long panoramas of visions.*



And I saw askant the armies,  
I saw as in noiseless dreams hundreds of battle-flags,  
Borne through the smoke of the battles and pierc'd with  
missiles I saw them,  
And carried hither and yon through the smoke, and torn  
and bloody,  
And at last but a few shreds left on the staffs, (and all  
in silence,)  
And the staffs all splinter'd and broken.

I saw battle-corpses, myriads of them,  
And the white skeletons of young men, I saw them,  
I saw the debris and debris of all the slain soldiers of  
the war,  
But I saw they were not as was thought,  
They themselves were fully at rest, they suffer'd not,  
The living remain'd and suffer'd, the mother suffer'd,  
And the wife and the child and the musing comrade  
suffer'd,  
And the armies that remain'd suffer'd.

16

Passing the visions, passing the night,  
Passing, unloosing the hold of my comrades' hands,  
Passing the song of the hermit bird and the tallying song  
of my soul,  
Victorious song, death's outlet song, yet varying ever-  
altering song,  
As low and wailing, yet clear the notes, rising and falling,  
flooding the night,  
Sadly sinking and fainting, as warning and warning, and  
yet again bursting with joy,  
Covering the earth and filling the spread of the heaven,  
As that powerful psalm in the night I heard from recesses,

Passing, I leave thee lilac with heart-shaped leaves,  
I leave thee there in the door-yard, blooming, returning  
with spring.

I cease from my song for thee,  
From my gaze on thee in the west, fronting the west,  
communing with thee,  
O comrade lustrous with silver face in the night.

Yet each to keep and all, retrievements out of the night,  
The song, the wondrous chant of the gray-brown bird,  
And the tallying chant, the echo arous'd in my soul,  
With the lustrous and drooping star with the countenance  
full of woe,  
With the holders holding my hand nearing the call of  
the bird,  
Comrades mine and I in the midst, and their memory  
ever to keep, for the dead I loved so well,  
For the sweetest, wisest soul of all my days and lands—  
and this for his dear sake,  
Lilac and star and bird twined with the chant of my soul,  
There in the fragrant pines and the cedars dusk and dim.

### OUT OF THE CRADLE ENDLESSLY ROCKING.

Out of the cradle endlessly rocking,  
Out of the mocking-bird's throat, the musical shuttle,  
Out of the Ninth-month midnight,  
Over the sterile sands and the fields beyond, where the  
child leaving his bed wander'd alone, bareheaded,  
barefoot,  
Down from the shower'd halo,

Up from the mystic play of shadows twining and twisting  
as if they were alive,  
Out from the patches of briers and blackberries,  
From the memories of the bird that chanted to me,  
From your memories sad brother, from the fitful risings  
and fallings I heard,  
From under that yellow half-moon late-risen and swollen  
as if with tears,  
From those beginning notes of yearning and love there  
in the mist,  
From the thousand responses of my heart never to cease,  
From the myriad thence-arous'd words,  
From the word stronger and more delicious than any,  
From such as now they start the scene revisiting,  
As a flock, twittering, rising, or overhead passing,  
Borne hither, ere all eludes me, hurriedly,  
A man, yet by these tears a little boy again,  
Throwing myself on the sand, confronting the waves,  
I, chanter of pains and joys, uniter of here and hereafter,  
Taking all hints to use them, but swiftly leaping beyond  
them,  
A reminiscence sing.

Once Paumanok,  
When the lilac-scent was in the air and Fifth-month  
grass was growing,  
Up this seashore in some briers,  
Two feather'd guests from Alabama, two together,  
And their nest, and four light-green eggs spotted with  
brown,  
And every day the he-bird to and fro near at hand,  
And every day the she-bird crouch'd on her nest, silent,  
with bright eyes,  
And every day I, a curious boy, never too close, never  
disturbing them,  
Cautiously peering, absorbing, translating.

*Shine ! Shine ! Shine !  
Pour down your warmth, great sun !  
While we bask, we two together.*

*Two together !  
Winds blow south, or winds blow north,  
Day come white, or night come black,  
Home, or rivers and mountains from home,  
Singing all time, minding no time,  
While we two keep together.*

Till of a sudden,  
May-be kill'd, unknown to her mate,  
One forenoon the she-bird crouch'd not on the nest,  
Nor return'd that afternoon, nor the next,  
Nor ever appear'd again.

And thenceforward all summer in the sound of the sea,  
And at night under the full of the moon in calmer  
weather,  
Over the hoarse surging of the sea,  
Or flitting from brier to brier by day,  
I saw, I heard at intervals the remaining one, the he-  
bird,  
The solitary guest from Alabama.

*Blow ! blow ! blow !  
Blow up sea-winds along Paumanok's shore ;  
I wait and I wait till you blow my mate to me.*

Yes, when the stars glisten'd,  
All night long on the prong of a moss-scallop'd stake,  
Down almost amid the slapping waves,  
Sat the lone singer wonderful causing tears.

He call'd on his mate,  
He pour'd forth the meanings which I of all men know.

Yes my brother I know,  
The rest might not, but I have treasur'd every note,  
For more than once dimly down to the beach gliding,  
Silent, avoiding the moonbeams, blending myself with  
the shadows,  
Recalling now the obscure shapes, the echoes, the sounds  
and sights after their sorts,  
The white arms out in the breakers tirelessly tossing,  
I, with bare feet, a child, the wind wafting my hair,  
Listen'd long and long.

Listen'd to keep, to sing, now translating the notes,  
Following you my brother.

*Soothe ! soothe ! soothe !  
Close on its wave soothes the wave behind,  
And again another behind embracing and lapping, every one  
close,  
But my love soothes not me, not me.*

*Low hangs the moon, it rose late,  
It is lagging—O I think it is heavy with love, with love.*

*O madly the sea pushes upon the land,  
With love, with love.*

*O night ! do I not see my love fluttering out among the  
breakers ?  
What is that little black thing I see there in the white ?*

*Loud ! loud ! loud !  
Loud I call to you, my love !  
High and clear I shoot my voice over the waves,  
Surely you must know who is here, is here,  
You must know who I am, my love.*

*Low-hanging moon !  
What is that dusky spot in your brown yellow ?  
O it is the shape, the shape of my mate !  
O moon do not keep her from me any longer.*

*Land ! land ! O land !  
Whichever way I turn, O I think you could give me my mate  
back again if you only would,  
For I am almost sure I see her dimly whichever way I look.*

*O rising stars !  
Perhaps the one I want so much will rise, will rise with some  
of you.*

*O throat ! O trembling throat !  
Sound clearer through the atmosphere !  
Pierce the woods, the earth,  
Somewhere listening to catch you must be the one I want.*

*Shake out carols !  
Solitary here, the night's carols !  
Carols of lonesome love ! death's carols !  
Carols under that lagging, yellow, waning moon !  
O under that moon where she droops almost down into the sea !  
O reckless despairing carols.*

*But soft ! sink low !  
Soft ! let me just murmur,  
And do you wait a moment you husky-nois'd sea,  
For somewhere I believe I heard my mate responding to me,  
So faint, I must be still, be still to listen,  
But not altogether still, for then she might not come immediately  
to me.*

*Hither my love !  
Here I am ! here !  
With this just-sustain'd note I announce myself to you,  
This gentle call is for you my love, for you.*

*Do not be decoy'd elsewhere,  
That is the whistle of the wind, it is not my voice,  
That is the fluttering, the fluttering of the spray,  
Those are the shadows of leaves.*

*O darkness ! O in vain !  
O I am very sick and sorrowful.*

*O brown halo in the sky near the moon, drooping upon the sea !  
O troubled reflection in the sea !  
O throat ! O throbbing heart !  
And I singing uselessly, uselessly all the night.*

*O past ! O happy life ! O songs of joy !  
In the air, in the woods, over fields,  
Loved ! loved ! loved ! loved ! loved !  
But my mate no more, no more with me !  
We two together no more.*

The aria sinking,  
All else continuing, the stars shining,  
The winds blowing, the notes of the bird continuous  
echoing.  
With angry moans the fierce old mother incessantly  
moaning,  
On the sands of Paumanok's shore grey and rustling,  
The yellow half-moon enlarged, sagging down, drooping,  
the face of the sea almost touching,  
The boy ecstatic, with his bare feet the waves, with his  
hair the atmosphere dallying,  
The love in the heart long pent, now loose, now at last  
tumultuously bursting,  
The aria's meaning, the ears, the soul, swiftly depositing,  
The strange tears down the cheeks coursing,  
The colloquy there, the trio, each uttering,  
The undertone, the savage old mother incessantly crying,

To the boy's soul's questions sullenly timing, some  
drown'd secret hissing,  
To the outsetting bard.

Demon or bird! (said the boy's soul,)  
Is it indeed toward your mate you sing? or is it really  
to me?  
For I, that was a child, my tongue's use sleeping, now I  
have heard you,  
Now in a moment I know what I am for, I awake,  
And already a thousand singers, a thousand songs,  
clearer, louder and more sorrowful than yours,  
A thousand warbling echoes have started to life within  
me, never to die.

O you singer solitary, singing by yourself, projecting me,  
O solitary me listening, never more shall I cease per-  
petuating you,  
Never more shall I escape, never more the reverberations,  
Never more the cries of unsatisfied love be absent from  
me,  
Never again leave me to be the peaceful child I was  
before what there in the night,  
By the sea under the yellow and sagging moon,  
The messenger there arous'd, the fire, the sweet hell  
within,  
The unknown want, the destiny of me.

O give me the clew! (it lurks in the night here some-  
where,)  
O if I am to have so much, let me have more!

A word then, (for I will conquer it,)  
The word final, superior to all,  
Subtle, sent up—what is it?—I listen;



Are you whispering it, and have been all the time, you  
sea-waves?

Is that it from your liquid rims and wet sands ?

Whereto answering, the sea,

Delaying not, hurrying not,

Whisper'd me through the night, and very plainly before  
daybreak,

Lisp'd to me the low and delicious word death,

And again death, death, death, death,

Hissing melodious, neither like the bird nor like my  
arous'd child's heart,

But edging near as privately for me rustling at my feet,

Creeping thence steadily up to my ears and laving me  
softly all over,

Death, death, death, death, death.

Which I do not forget,

But fuse the song of my dusky demon and brother,

That he sang to me in the moonlight on Paumanok's  
gray beach,

With the thousand responsive songs at random,

My own songs awaked from that hour,

And with them the key, the word up from the waves,

The word of the sweetest song and all songs,

That strong and delicious word which, creeping to my  
feet,

(Or like some old crone rocking the cradle, swathed in  
sweet garments, bending aside,)

The sea whisper'd me.

## TEARS

TEARS! tears! tears!

In the night, in solitude, tears,

On the white shore dripping, dripping, suck'd in by the  
sand,

Tears, not a star shining, all dark and desolate,  
Moist tears from the eyes of a muffled head;  
O who is that ghost? that form in the dark, with  
tears?  
What shapeless lump is that, bent, crouch'd there on  
the sand?  
Streaming tears, sobbing tears, throes, choked with wild  
cries;  
O storm, embodied, rising, careering with swift steps  
along the beach!  
O wild and dismal night storm, with wind—O belching  
and desperate!  
O shade so sedate and decorous by day, with calm coun-  
tenance and regulated pace,  
But away at night as you fly, none looking—O then the  
unloosen'd ocean  
Of tears! tears! tears!

#### TO THE MAN-OF-WAR-BIRD

THOU who hast slept all night upon the storm,  
Waking renew'd on thy prodigious pinions,  
(Burst the wild storm? above it thou ascend'st,  
And rested on the sky, thy slave that cradled thee,)  
Now a blue point, far, far in heaven floating,  
As to the light emerging here on deck I watch thee,  
(Myself a speck, a point on the world's floating vast.)  
Far, far at sea,  
After the night's fierce drifts have strewn the shore with  
wrecks,  
With re-appearing day as now so happy and serene,  
The rosy and elastic dawn, the flashing sun,  
The limpid spread of air cerulean,  
Thou also re-appearest.

Thou born to match the gale, (thou art all wings,)  
To cope with heaven and earth and sea and hurricane,  
Thou ship of air that never furl'st thy sails,  
Days, even weeks untired and onward, through spaces,  
    realms gyrating,  
At dusk that look'st on Senegal, at morn America.  
That sport'st amid the lightning-flash and thunder-  
    cloud,  
In them, in thy experiences, had'st thou my soul,  
What joys ! what joys were thine !

### PATROLING BARNEGAT.

WILD, wild the storm, and the sea high running,  
Steady the roar of the gale, with incessant undertone  
    muttering,  
Shouts of demoniac laughter fitfully piercing and pealing,  
Waves, air, midnight, their savagest trinity lashing,  
Out in the shadows their milk-white combs careering,  
On beachy slush and sand spirts of snow fierce  
    slanting,  
Where through the murk the easterly death-wind  
    breasting,  
Through cutting swirl and spray watchful and firm  
    advancing,  
(That in the distance ! is that a wreck ? is the red signal  
    flaring ?)  
Slush and sand of the beach tireless till daylight wending,  
Steadily, slowly, through hoarse roar never remitting,  
Along the midnight edge by those milk-white combs  
    careering,  
A group of dim, weird forms, struggling, the night  
    confronting,  
That savage trinity warily watching.

## WITH HUSKY-HAUGHTY LIPS, O SEA !

With husky-haughty lips, O sea !  
Where day and night I wend thy surf-beat shore,  
Imaging to my sense thy varied strange suggestions,  
(I see and plainly list thy talk and conference here,)  
Thy troops of white-maned racers racing to the goal,  
Thy ample, smiling face, dash'd with the sparkling  
    dimples of the sun,  
Thy brooding scowl and murk—thy unloos'd hurricanes,  
Thy unsubduedness, caprices, wilfulness ;  
Great as thou art above the rest, thy many tears—a lack  
    from all eternity in thy content,  
(Naught but the greatest struggles, wrongs, defeats,  
    could make thee greatest—no less could make thee,)  
Thy lonely state—something thou ever seek'st and  
    seek'st, yet never gain'st,  
Surely some right withheld—some voice, in huge  
    monotonous rage, of freedom-lover pent,  
Some vast heart, like a planet's, chain'd and chafing  
    in those breakers,  
By lengthen'd swell, and spasm, and panting breath,  
And rhythmic rasping of thy sands and waves,  
And serpent hiss, and savage peals of laughter,  
And undertones of distant lion roar,  
(Sounding, appealing to the sky's deaf ear—but now,  
    rapport for once,  
A phantom in the night thy confidant for once,)  
The first and last confession of the globe,  
Outsurging, muttering from thy soul's abysses,  
The tale of cosmic elemental passion  
Thou tellest to a kindred soul.

## FROM MONTAUK POINT.

I **STAND** as on some mighty eagle's beak,  
Eastward the sea absorbing, viewing, (nothing but sea  
    and sky,)

The tossing waves, the foam, the ships in the distance,  
The wild unrest, the snowy, curling caps—that inbound  
urge and urge of waves,  
Seeking the shores forever.

### PROUDLY THE FLOOD COMES IN.

PROUDLY the flood comes in, shouting, foaming,  
advancing,  
Long it holds at the high, with bosom broad outswelling,  
All throbs, dilates—the farms, woods, streets of cities—  
workmen at work,  
Mainsails, topsails, jibs, appear in the offing—steamers'  
pennants of smoke—and under the forenoon sun,  
Freighted with human lives, gaily the outward bound,  
gaily the inward bound,  
Flaunting from many a spar the flag I love.

### HAD I THE CHOICE.

HAD I the choice to tally greatest bards,  
To limn their portraits, stately, beautiful, and emulate  
at will,  
Homer with all his wars and warriors—Hector, Achilles,  
Ajax,  
Or Shakspeare's woe-entangled Hamlet, Lear, Othello—  
Tennyson's fair ladies,  
Metre or wit the best, or choice conceit to wield in  
perfect rhyme, delight of singers;  
These, these, O sea, all these I'd gladly barter,  
Would you the undulation of one wave, its trick to me  
transfer,  
Or breathe one breath of yours upon my verse,  
And leave its odor there.

## BY THAT LONG SCAN OF WAVES.

By that long scan of waves, myself call'd back, resumed  
upon myself,  
In every crest some undulating light or shade—some  
retrospect,  
Joys, travels, studies, silent panoramas—scenes ephemeral,  
The long past war, the battles, hospital sights, the  
wounded and the dead,  
Myself through every by-gone phase—my idle youth—  
old age at hand,  
My three-score years of life summ'd up, and more, and  
past,  
By any grand ideal tried, intentionless, the whole a  
nothing,  
And haply yet some drop within God's scheme's  
ensemble—some wave, or part of wave,  
Like one of yours, ye multitudinous ocean.

## HALCYON DAYS.

Not from successful love alone,  
Nor wealth, nor honor'd middle age, nor victories of  
politics or war ;  
But as life wanes, and all the turbulent passions calm,  
As gorgeous, vapory, silent hues cover the evening  
sky,  
As softness, fulness, rest, suffuse the frame, like fresher,  
balmier air,  
As the days take on a mellower light, and the apple at  
last hangs really finish'd and indolent-ripe on the  
tree,  
Then for the teeming quietest, happiest days of all !  
The brooding and blissful halcyon days !

## A PRAIRIE SUNSET.

Shot gold, maroon and violet, dazzling silver, emerald,  
fawn,  
The earth's whole amplitude and Nature's multiform  
power consign'd for once to colors ;  
The light, the general air possess'd by them—colors till  
now unknown,  
No limit, confine—not the Western sky alone—the high  
meridian—North, South, all,  
Pure luminous color fighting the silent shadows to the  
last.

## WHISPERS OF HEAVENLY DEATH.

WHISPERS of heavenly death murmur'd I hear,  
Labial gossip of night, sibilant chorals,  
Footsteps gently ascending, mystical breezes wafted soft  
and low,  
Ripples of unseen rivers, tides of a current flowing,  
forever flowing,  
(Or is it the plashing of tears ? the measureless waters  
of human tears ?)

I see, just see skyward, great cloud-masses,  
Mournfully slowly they roll, silently swelling and  
mixing,  
With at times a half-dimm'd sadden'd far-off star,  
Appearing and disappearing.

(Some parturition rather, some solemn immortal birth ;  
On the frontiers to eyes impenetrable,  
Some soul is passing over.)

## ASSURANCES.

- I **NEED** no assurances, I am a man who is pre-occupied of his own soul ;
- I do not doubt that from under the feet and beside the hands and face I am cognizant of, are now looking faces I am not cognizant of, calm and actual faces,
- I do not doubt but the majesty and beauty of the world are latent in any iota of the world,
- I do not doubt I am limitless, and that the universes are limitless, in vain I try to think how limitless,
- I do not doubt that the orbs and the systems of orbs play their swift sports through the air on purpose, and that I shall one day be eligible to do as much as they, and more than they,
- I do not doubt that temporary affairs keep on and on millions of years,
- I do not doubt interiors have their interiors, and exteriors have their exteriors, and that the eyesight has another eyesight, and the hearing another hearing, and the voice another voice,
- I do not doubt that the passionately-wept deaths of young men are provided for, and that the deaths of young women and the deaths of little children are provided for,
- (Did you think Life was so well provided for, and Death, the purport of all Life, is not well provided for?)
- I do not doubt that wrecks at sea, no matter what the horrors of them, no matter whose wife, child, husband, father, lover, has gone down, are provided for, to the minutest points,
- I do not doubt that whatever can possibly happen anywhere at any time, is provided for in the inherences of things,
- I do not think Life provides for all and for Time and Space, but I believe Heavenly Death provides for all.



## NIGHT ON THE PRAIRIES.

NIGHT on the prairies,  
The supper is over, the fire on the ground burns low,  
The wearied emigrants sleep, wrapt in their blankets;  
I walk by myself—I stand and look at the stars, which  
    I think now I never realized before.  
Now I absorb immortality and peace,  
I admire death and test propositions.

How plenteous! how spiritual! how resumé!  
The same old man and soul—the same old aspirations,  
    and the same content.

I was thinking the day most splendid till I saw what the  
    not-day exhibited,  
I was thinking this globe enough till there sprang out so  
    noiseless around me myriads of other globes.

Now while the great thoughts of space and eternity fill  
    me I will measure myself by them,  
And now touch'd with the lives of other globes arrived  
    as far along as those of the earth,  
Or waiting to arrive, or pass'd on farther than those of  
    the earth,  
I henceforth no more ignore them than I ignore my own  
    life,  
Or the lives of the earth arrived as far as mine, or  
    waiting to arrive.

O I see now that life cannot exhibit all to me, as the  
    day cannot,  
I see that I am to wait for what will be exhibited by  
    death.

## A CLEAR MIDNIGHT.

THIS is thy hour, O Soul, thy free flight into the wordless,  
Away from books, away from art, the day erased, the  
    lesson done,  
Thee fully forth emerging, silent, gazing, pondering the  
    themes thou lovest best,  
Night, sleep, death and the stars.

## DEATH'S VALLEY.

*To accompany a picture ; by request. "The Valley of the Shadow of  
Death," from the painting by George Inness.*

NAY, do not dream, designer dark,  
Thou hast portray'd or hit thy theme entire ;  
I, hoverer of late by this dark valley, by its confines,  
    having glimpses of it,  
Here enter lists with thee, claiming my right to make a  
    symbol too.  
For I have seen many wounded soldiers die,  
After dread suffering—have seen their lives pass off with  
    smiles ;  
And I have watch'd the death-hours of the old ; and seen  
    the infant die ;  
The rich, with all his nurses and his doctors ;  
And then the poor, in meagreness and poverty ;  
And I myself for long, O Death, have breath'd my every  
    breath  
Amid the nearness and the silent thought of thee.  
And out of these and thee,  
I make a scene, a song (not fear of thee,  
Nor gloom's ravines, nor bleak, nor dark—for I do not  
    fear thee,  
Nor celebrate the struggle, or contortion, or hard-tied  
    knot),

Of the broad blessed light and perfect air, with meadows,  
    rippling tides, and trees and flowers and grass,  
And the low hum of living breeze—and in the midst  
    God's beautiful eternal right hand,  
Thee, holiest minister of Heaven—thee, envoy, usherer,  
    guide at last of all,  
Rich, florid, loosener of the stricture-knot call'd life,  
Sweet, peaceful, welcome Death.

## PASSAGE TO INDIA.

### I

SINGING my days,  
Singing the great achievements of the present,  
Singing the strong light works of engineers,  
Our modern wonders, (the antique ponderous Seven  
    outvied,)  
In the Old World the east the Suez canal,  
The New by its mighty railroad spann'd,  
The seas inlaid with eloquent gentle wires ;  
Yet first to sound, and ever sound, the cry with thee, O  
    soul,  
The Past ! the Past ! the Past !

The Past—the dark unfathom'd retrospect !  
The teeming gulf—the sleepers and the shadows !  
The past—the infinite greatness of the past !  
For what is the present after all but a growth out of the  
    past ?  
(As a projectile form'd, impell'd, passing a certain line,  
    still keeps on,  
So the present, utterly form'd, impell'd by the past.)

## 2

Passage, O soul, to India !  
 Eclaircise the myths Asiatic, the primitive fables.

Not you alone, proud truths of the world,  
 Nor you alone, ye facts of modern science,  
 But myths and fables of eld, Asia's, Africa's fables,  
 The far-darting beams of the spirit, the unloos'd dreams,  
 The deep diving bibles and legends,  
 The daring plots of the poets, the elder religions ;  
 O you temples fairer than lilies pour'd over by the rising  
   sun !  
 O you fables spurning the known, eluding the hold of  
   the known, mounting to heaven !  
 You lofty and dazzling towers, pinnacled, red as roses,  
   burnish'd with gold !  
 Towers of fables immortal fashion'd from mortal dreams !  
 You too I welcome and fully the same as the rest !  
 You too with joy I sing.

Passage to India !  
 Lo, soul, seest thou not God's purpose from the first ?  
 The earth to be spann'd, connected by network,  
 The races, neighbors, to marry and be given in marriage,  
 The oceans to be cross'd, the distant brought near,  
 The lands to be welded together.

A worship new I sing,  
 You captains, voyagers, explorers, yours,  
 You engineers, you architects, machinists, yours,  
 You, not for trade or transportation only,  
 But in God's name, and for thy sake, O soul.

## 3

Passage to India !  
 Lo soul for thee of tableaux twain,

I see in one the Suez canal initiated, open'd,  
I see the procession of steamships, the Empress Eugenie's  
    leading the van,  
I mark from on deck the strange landscape, the pure  
    sky, the level sand in the distance,  
I pass swiftly the picturesque groups, the workmen  
    gather'd.  
The gigantic dredging machines.

In one again, different, (yet thine, all thine, O soul, the  
    same,)  
I see over my own continent the pacific railroad sur-  
    mounting every barrier,  
I see continual trains of cars winding along the Platte  
    carrying freight and passengers,  
I hear the locomotives rushing and roaring, and the  
    shrill steam-whistle,  
I hear the echoes reverberate through the grandest  
    scenery in the world,  
I cross the Laramie plains, I note the rocks in grotesque  
    shapes, the buttes,  
I see the plentiful larkspur and wild onions, the barren,  
    colorless, sage-deserts,  
I see in glimpses afar or towering immediately above me  
    the great mountains, I see the Wind river and the  
    Wahsatch mountains,  
I see the Monument mountain and the Eagle's Nest, I  
    pass the Promontory, I ascend the Nevadas,  
I scan the noble Elk mountain and wind around its  
    base,  
I see the Humboldt range, I thread the valley and cross  
    the river,  
I see the clear waters of lake Tahoe, I see forests of  
    majestic pines,  
Or crossing the great desert, the alkaline plains, I behold  
    enchancing mirages of waters and meadows,

Marking through these and after all, in duplicate slender  
lines,  
Bridging the three or four thousand miles of land travel,  
Tying the Eastern to the Western sea,  
The road between Europe and Asia.

(Ah Genoese thy dream ! thy dream !  
Centuries after thou art laid in thy grave,  
The shore thou foundest verifies thy dream.)

4

Passage to India !  
Struggles of many a captain, tales of many a sailor dead,  
Over my mood stealing and spreading they come,  
Like clouds and cloudlets in the unreach'd sky.

Along all history, down the slopes,  
As a rivulet running, sinking now, and now again to the  
surface rising,  
A ceaseless thought, a varied train—lo, soul, to thee,  
thy sight, they rise,  
The plans, the voyages again, the expeditions ;  
Again Vasco de Gama sails forth,  
Again the knowledge gain'd, the mariner's compass,  
Lands found and nations born, thou born America,  
For purpose vast, man's long probation fill'd,  
Thou rondure of the world at last accomplish'd.

5

O vast Rondure, swimming in space,  
Cover'd all over with visible power and beauty,  
Alternate light and day and the teeming spiritual dark-  
ness,  
Unspeakable high processions of sun and moon and  
countless stars above,

Below, the manifold grass and waters, animals, mountains, trees,  
With inscrutable purpose, some hidden prophetic intention,  
Now first it seems my thought begins to span thee.

Down from the gardens of Asia descending radiating,  
Adam and Eve appear, then their myriad progeny after them,  
Wandering, yearning, curious, with restless explorations,  
With questionings, baffled, formless, feverish, with never-happy hearts,  
With that sad incessant refrain, *Wherefore unsatisfied soul ? and Whither O mocking life ?*

Ah who shall soothe these feverish children ?  
Who justify these restless explorations ?  
Who speak the secret of impassive earth ?  
Who bind it to us ? what is this separate Nature so unnatural ?  
What is this earth to our affections ? (unloving earth, without a throb to answer ours,  
Cold earth, the place of graves.)

Yet soul be sure the first intent remains, and shall be carried out,  
Perhaps even now the time has arrived.

After the seas are all cross'd, (as they seem already cross'd,)  
After the great captains and engineers have accomplish'd their work,  
After the noble inventors, after the scientists, the chemist, the geologist, ethnologist,  
Finally shall come the poet worthy that name,  
The true son of God shall come singing his songs.

Then not your deeds only, O voyagers, O scientists and  
inventors, shall be justified,  
All these hearts as of fretted children shall be sooth'd,  
All affection shall be fully responded to, the secret shall  
be told,  
All these separations and gaps shall be taken up and  
hook'd and link'd together,  
The whole earth, this cold, impassive, voiceless earth,  
shall be completely justified,  
Trinitas divine shall be gloriously accomplish'd and  
compacted by the true son of God, the poet,  
(He shall indeed pass the straits and conquer the  
mountains,  
He shall double the cape of Good Hope to some purpose,)  
Nature and Man shall be disjoin'd and diffused no more,  
The true son of God shall absolutely fuse them.

6

Year at whose wide-flung door I sing !  
Year of the purpose accomplish'd !  
Year of the marriage of continents, climates and oceans !  
(No mere doge of Venice now wedding the Adriatic,)  
I see O year in you the vast terraqueous globe given  
and giving all,  
Europe to Asia, Africa join'd, and they to the New  
World,  
The lands, geographies, dancing before you, holding a  
festival garland,  
As brides and bridegrooms hand in hand.

Passage to India !  
Cooling airs from Caucasus far, soothing cradle of man,  
The river Euphrates flowing, the past lit up again.

Lo soul, the retrospect brought forward,  
The old, most populous, wealthiest of earth's lands,



The streams of the Indus and the Ganges and their  
many affluents,  
(I my shores of America walking to-day behold, resuming  
all,)  
The tale of Alexander on his warlike marches suddenly  
dying,  
On one side China and on the other side Persia and  
Arabia,  
To the south the great seas and the bay of Bengal,  
The flowing literatures, tremendous epics, religions,  
castes,  
Old occult Brahma interminably far back, the tender  
and junior Buddha,  
Central and southern empires and all their belongings,  
possessors,  
The wars of Tamerlane, the reign of Aurungzebe,  
The traders, rulers, explorers, Moslems, Venetians,  
Byzantium, the Arabs, Portuguese,  
The first travelers famous yet, Marco Polo, Batouta the  
Moor,  
Doubts to be solv'd, the map incognita, blanks to be  
fill'd,  
The foot of man unstay'd, the hands never at rest,  
Thyself, O soul, that will not brook a challenge.

The mediæval navigators rise before me,  
The world of 1492, with its awaken'd enterprise,  
Something swelling in humanity now like the sap of the  
earth in spring,  
The sunset splendor of chivalry declining.

And who art thou sad shade?  
Gigantic, visionary, thyself a visionary,  
With majestic limbs and pious beaming eyes,  
Spreading around with every look of thine a golden world,  
Enhuing it with gorgeous hues.

As the chief histrion,  
Down to the footlights walks in some great scena,  
Dominating the rest I see the Admiral himself,  
(History's type of courage, action, faith,) Behold him sail from Palos leading his little fleet,  
His voyage behold, his return, his great fame,  
His misfortunes, calumniators, behold him a prisoner,  
chain'd,  
Behold his dejection, poverty, death.

(Curious in time I stand, noting the efforts of heroes,  
Is the deferment long? bitter the slander, poverty, death?  
Lies the seed unreck'd for centuries in the ground? lo,  
to God's due occasion,  
Uprising in the night, it sprouts, blooms,  
And fills the earth with use and beauty.)

7

Passage indeed, O soul, to primal thought,  
Not lands and seas alone, thy own clear freshness,  
The young maturity of brood and bloom,  
To realms of budding bibles.

O soul, repressless, I with thee and thou with me,  
Thy circumnavigation of the world begin,  
Of man, the voyage of his mind's return,  
To reason's early paradise,  
Back, back to wisdom's birth, to innocent intuitions,  
Again with fair creation.

8

O we can wait no longer,  
We too take ship, O soul,  
Joyous we too launch out on trackless seas,

Fearless for unknown shores on waves of ecstasy to sail  
Amid the wafting winds, (thou pressing me to thee, I  
thee to me, O soul,)   
Caroling free, singing our song of God,  
Chanting our chant of pleasant exploration.

With laugh and many a kiss,  
(Let others deprecate, let others weep for sin, remorse,  
humiliation,)   
O soul thou pleasest me, I thee.

Ah more than any priest, O soul, we too believe in God,  
But with the mystery of God we dare not dally.

O soul thou pleasest me, I thee,  
Sailing these seas or on the hills, or waking in the night,  
Thoughts, silent thoughts, of Time and Space and  
Death, like waters flowing,  
Bear me indeed as through the regions infinite,  
Whose air I breathe, whose ripples hear, lave me all  
over,  
Bathe me, O God, in thee, mounting to thee,  
I and my soul to range in range of thee.

O Thou transcendent,  
Nameless, the fibre and the breath,  
Light of the light, shedding forth universes, thou centre  
of them,  
Thou mightier centre of the true, the good, the loving,  
Thou moral, spiritual fountain—affection's source—thou  
reservoir,  
(O pensive soul of me—O thirst unsatisfied—waitest  
not there?  
Waitest not haply for us somewhere there the Comrade  
perfect?)

Thou pulse—thou motive of the stars, suns, systems,  
That, circling, move in order, safe, harmonious,  
Athwart the shapeless vastnesses of space,  
How should I think, how breathe a single breath, how  
    speak, if, out of myself,  
I could not launch, to those, superior universes ?

Swiftly I shrivel at the thought of God,  
At Nature and its wonders, Time and Space and Death,  
But that I, turning, call to thee, O soul, thou actual Me,  
And lo, thou gently masterest the orbs,  
Thou matest Time, smilest content at Death,  
And fillest, swellest full the vastnesses of Space.

Greater than stars or suns,  
Bounding, O soul, thou journeyest forth ;  
What love than thine and ours could wider amplify ?  
What aspirations, wishes, outvie thine and ours, O soul ?  
What dreams of the ideal ? what plans of purity,  
    perfection, strength ?  
What cheerful willingness for others' sake to give up all ?  
For others' sake to suffer all ?

Reckoning ahead, O soul, when thou, the time achiev'd,  
The seas all cross'd, weather'd the capes, the voyage  
    done,  
Surrounded, copest, frontest God, yieldest, the aim  
    attain'd,  
As fill'd with friendship, love complete, the Elder  
    Brother found,  
The Younger melts in fondness in his arms.

9

Passage to more than India !  
Are thy wings plumed indeed for such far flights ?

O soul, voyagest thou indeed on voyages like those ?  
Disportest thou on waters such as those ?  
Soundest below the Sanscrit and the Vedas ?  
Then have thy bent unleash'd.

Passage to you, your shores, ye aged fierce enigmas !  
Passage to you, to mastership of you, ye strangling  
    problems !  
You, strew'd with the wrecks of skeletons, that, living,  
    never reach'd you.

Passage to more than India !  
O secret of the earth and sky !  
Of you, O waters of the sea ! O winding creeks and  
    rivers !  
Of you, O woods and fields ! of you, strong mountains of  
    my land !  
Of you, O prairies ! of you, gray rocks !  
O morning red ! O clouds ! O rain and snows !  
O day and night, passage to you !

O sun and moon, and all you stars ! Sirius and Jupiter !  
Passage to you !

Passage, immediate passage ! the blood burns in my  
    veins !  
Away, O soul ! hoist instantly the anchor !  
Cut the hawsers—haul out—shake out every sail !  
Have we not stood here like trees in the ground long  
    enough ?  
Have we not grovel'd here long enough, eating and  
    drinking like mere brutes ?  
Have we not darken'd and dazed ourselves with books  
    long enough ?

Sail forth—steer for the deep waters only,  
Reckless O soul, exploring, I with thee, and thou with  
me,  
For we are bound where mariner has not yet dared  
to go,  
And we will risk the ship, ourselves and all.

O my brave soul!  
O farther farther sail!  
O daring joy, but safe! are they not all the seas of  
God?  
O farther, farther, farther sail!

### THAT MUSIC ALWAYS ROUND ME.

THAT music always round me, unceasing, unbeginning,  
yet long untaught I did not hear,  
But now the chorus I hear and am elated,  
A tenor, strong, ascending with power and health, with  
glad notes of daybreak I hear,  
A soprano at intervals sailing buoyantly over the tops of  
immense waves,  
A transparent base shuddering lusciously under and  
through the universe,  
The triumphant tutti, the funeral wailings with sweet  
flutes and violins, all these I fill myself with,  
I hear not the volumes of sound merely, I am moved by  
the exquisite meanings,  
I listen to the different voices winding in and out, striving,  
contending with fiery vehemence to excel each other  
in emotion  
I do not think the performers know themselves—but  
now I think I begin to know them.

## THE UNEXPRESS'D.

How dare one say it ?  
After the cycles, poems, singers, plays,  
Vaunted Ionia's, India's—Homer, Shakspeare—the long,  
    long times' thick dotted roads, areas,  
The shining clusters and the Milky Ways of stars—  
    Nature's pulses reap'd,  
All retrospective passions, heroes, war, love, adoration,  
All ages' plummets dropt to their utmost depths,  
All human lives, throats, wishes, brains—all experiences'  
    utterance ;  
After the countless songs, or long or short, all tongues,  
    all lands,  
Still something not yet told in poesy's voice or print—  
    something lacking,  
(Who knows ? the best yet unexpress'd and lacking.)

## A RIDDLE SONG.

THAT which eludes this verse and any verse,  
Unheard by sharpest ear, unform'd in clearest eye or  
    cunningest mind,  
Nor lore nor fame, nor happiness nor wealth,  
And yet the pulse of every heart and life throughout the  
    world incessantly,  
Which you and I and all pursuing ever ever miss,  
Open but still a secret, the real of the real, an illusion,  
Costless, vouchsafed to each, yet never man the owner,  
Which poets vainly seek to put in rhyme, historians in  
    prose,  
Which sculptor never chisel'd yet, nor painter painted,  
Which vocalist never sung, nor orator nor actor ever  
    utter'd,  
Invoking here and now I challenge for my song.

Indifferently, 'mid public, private haunts, in solitude,  
Behind the mountain and the wood,  
Companion of the city's busiest streets, through the  
    assemblage,  
It and its radiations constantly glide.

In looks of fair unconscious babes,  
Or strangely in the coffin'd dead,  
Or show of breaking dawn or stars by night,  
As some dissolving delicate film of dreams,  
Hiding yet lingering.

Two little breaths of words comprising it,  
Two words, yet all from first to last comprised in it.

How ardently for it !  
How many ships have sail'd and sunk for it !  
How many travelers started from their homes and ne'er  
    return'd !  
How much of genius boldly staked and lost for it !  
What countless stores of beauty, love, ventur'd for it !  
How all superbest deeds since Time began are traceable  
    to it—and shall be to the end !  
How all heroic martyrdoms to it !  
How, justified by it, the horrors, evils, battles of the  
    earth !  
How the bright fascinating lambent flames of it, in every  
    age and land, have drawn men's eyes,  
Rich as a sunset on the Norway coast, the sky, the  
    islands, and the cliffs,  
Or midnight's silent glowing northern lights unreachable.

Haply God's riddle it, so vague and yet so certain,  
The soul for it, and all the visible universe for it,  
And heaven at last for it.





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